

Chapter II

The Awakening of Women in the Church

Towards the end of the Sixties many women raised their voices in the churches, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, as they became more and more conscious of their marginal position in the community of believers. Nor did this awakening suddenly drop from the sky – it was preceded and influenced by the feminist movement in society. Moreover, the women's movement in the Catholic Church should also be seen in relation to the emancipation of the laity. This chapter will, therefore, focus on the women's movement as it manifested itself in society during the Sixties, simultaneous with the growing autonomy of the laity.

II.1. The Feminist Movement in Society

II.1.1. The First Feminist Wave (approx. 1870-1920)

The first feminist wave was especially aimed at acquiring equal rights and opportunities for women in society. The struggle concentrated on equal rights in education, equal pay for equal work and on political rights for women, especially universal suffrage, which women in the Netherlands received in 1919.

Although the emancipation movement had a certain success, this wave did not go beyond the demand for equal rights. Women believed that once the right to vote was acquired the position of women would be secured. They did not realise that the process of emancipation would not be completed with equal rights for women and men. These equal rights meant only an adaptation of a society dominated by men: i.e. women participating within male-defined conditions. A far more radical revolution was still needed to change the fundamentally androcentric society and culture.

II.1.2. The Second Feminist Wave

This conscious awareness arose in the Fifties and Sixties and it is not surprising that a feminist consciousness originated in those years. During World War II women, usually compelled by necessity, took over the work of men. Especially in the United States many women entered the workplace and held responsible positions. When the men returned and reclaimed their jobs after the war, these women were again pushed back into housekeeping and childcare. This, however, seems to be only a background to the awakening of women. The same phenomenon occurred after World War I but at that time did not result in such a broad feminist wave.

Education probably played a far more decisive role. Many young women were able to attend high school and university which in turn strengthened their self-esteem. Some of these young women then wished for, even demanded, a role in society - a job equal to that of a man. Further, technology had not only lightened housework through the development of domestic appliances but also provided devices which made jobs available to women that had previously required considerable physical strength.

Another significant influence came from medical developments in the realm of contraception, allowing women to make choices about reproduction. In general families became smaller and, after children had left the home, women still had a useful life-span ahead. Finally, increasing prosperity played a role as economic growth called women into the labour market.

These factors together formed the framework which led to the development of a strong feminist awakening. From their own experience women became more and more conscious of their subordinate, second-rate position in an androcentric society. They began to realise that it was not enough to make up deficits, but that radical and structural change to the existing society and culture was needed in order to: 'emancipate half of humanity'. This was Feminism as counter-culture.

Women further opposed stereotypical views about women and men, views that (often unconsciously) informed society. They opposed concepts such as 'feminine nature' and 'femininity' because these were culturally defined and traditionally maintained. Feminism was now a process of liberation in which women found their own identity and a new self-respect, in which they experienced that as free persons they could develop their capacities and fulfil their role in society.

This radical feminism originated in the United States and soon spread world-wide. See, among other, Betty Frieden with *The Feminine Mystique*¹⁶, the Women's Liberation Movement, the National Organisation for Women and Women Power. Soon it took on a worldwide form. On November 7th 1967 the UNO published the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women¹⁷, and very quickly the movement appeared in Europe, manifesting itself in the Netherlands around 1965.

The new feminist awakening soon brought about much reflection on women's experience of life. In order to change a situation one must gain a clear vision of the status quo. That requires research, reflection and elaboration of a theory. In the United States Kate Millet was one of the first women who developed such an analysis. Her book *Sexual Politics*¹⁸ had a great influence on the first scientific studies on women. Research began in various fields on the origin of negative images of women in culture, the economic, social and cultural origin of inequality of power, the societal structures of oppression, the power of language in relation to discrimination and the ideological background of discrimination.

Around 1970 in almost all the universities in the Netherlands scientific women's studies sprang up and a stream of publications appeared in many fields: anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literature, history, law, psychology, education, theology. One stimulant for the recognition of women was certainly the proclamation by the United Nations that 1975 was to be 'The Year of Women', with the goal of making visible worldwide the situation of women in society and the stimulation of new initiatives. From then on it was impossible that this movement in society would not eventually meet with a wide response in the churches. As Schillebeeckx put it, 'In practice faith never anticipates our human life-experience'. This was also true for the feminist movement, which inspired christian women to devote themselves to the struggle for equal responsibility in the church. For women in the Roman Catholic Church there existed an extra difficulty, because not only for them but also for the male laity there was almost no other place than that of 'beloved faithful' in the pews. Women therefore

¹⁶ Betty Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York 1963.

¹⁷ This declaration was, on 18 December 1975, followed by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The clauses in the declaration were thereby defined in legal and political terms juridically and politically, actualized the stipulations of the Declaration

¹⁸ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, New York 1970.

felt they could only obtain their own recognition by pushing for autonomy for all the laity.

II.2. Rediscovery of the Laity in the Church

Although in the early Church every Christian participated in the shared mission and no sharp division existed between clergy and laity (called by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza the 'discipleship of equals'¹⁹), the Roman Catholic Church, in the course of almost 2000 years, grew into a male clerical bulwark. The proper responsibility of the laity had so much diminished that it was characterised as 'the forgotten ministry'. Only in the 20th Century was this accepted status contested. It was finally recognised that Church and Society had grown apart, that in the world far-reaching changes in many fields had taken place and a process of secularisation had been set in motion. This brought the Catholic Church to a new reflection on her task in the world. The world as her field of work. Or, as Letty Russels says: "The direct focus ceases to be on God and the world. The church only indirectly comes into focus as a postscript on that reality. One way of expressing this is to say that the church is seen as a P.S. on God's love affair with the world. (John 3:16)".²⁰

The Catholic Church became conscious that she was a community of all believers and that the laity had an important place in her task in the World. 'Without the laity the Church would not be able to fulfil an essential aspect of her supernatural mission.... Lay people are 'the builders of the World Order'.

This change of attitude became clear in the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962 in order to update the Catholic Church. This Council pushed forward a renewed notion of church, a vision of church as People of God, in which all believers carry responsibility for the work in the world as well as for internal church tasks. The following was stated in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World *Gaudium et Spes* (No. 43): "The worldly tasks and activities form the rightful, although not exclusive, field of the laity.... Laypersons, who have to play an active role in the whole life of the church, have not only the obligation to inspire the world with a christian spirit but are also called to be witnesses of Christ in all situations within human society".

The translation of and the reflection on the actual effects of *Gaudium et Spes* took place in the Third World Lay Congress in Rome in 1967. More than 2000 lay people from different countries, among these a Dutch delegation under the leadership of Rie Vendrik, participated in this congress and many ideas and initiatives emanated from it. After the Second Vatican Council a new élan went through the Catholic world and the laity, women and men, became conscious of their mission. They devoted themselves to work in parishes, discussion groups, catechetics and the preparation of liturgical celebrations. In several countries the number of lay persons studying theology increased. Many lay people began to work professionally in the churches. In short, lay people were gradually taking responsibility for policy and management in the Catholic Church.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, a Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York 1983, 140.

²⁰ Letty Russel, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology*, Philadelphia 1974 158.

The Netherlands

The Catholics in the Netherlands were extremely impressed and felt themselves very involved by the Second Vatican Council. The decrees were almost immediately translated into practical initiatives.

- ? A modernisation of the Church in a democratic manner evolved in a very short space of time. Lay members were permitted to take part in both parochial and diocesan advice and management organs;
- ? Lay Members' discussion groups were established in all dioceses and these groups worked on, amongst other tasks, Bible study, their experience of belief at that time, and suggestions about a liturgy which would fit the feelings of modern people;
- ? Educational and training courses were set up for lay people to assist in pastoral work (Maartenshof 1965);
- ? The Catholic University of Nijmegen admitted both lay women and lay men to read theology in the Sixties; this resulted in immediate interest. Gradually and more and more female and male pastoral workers received tasks in the parishes.
- ? The culminating point in the history of the Dutch Church was in fact the Dutch Pastoral Council which consisted of 6 plenary sessions held in Noordwijkerhout between 1968 and 1970. The object of this council was to translate the Vatican Councils' decrees and decisions into a Dutch "climate". Engaged lay members, together with priests and bishops, worked with great frankness and toleration for each others feelings on such subjects as, 'faith in our time', 'marriage and family', 'young people' and 'the priestly ministry'.

The lay member began to become of age and grown-up.

II.3. The Awakening of Women in the Church

II.3.1. Historical Survey, ca. 1960-1975

In the Sixties women made a considerable stir in the churches. More and more they were conscious of their second-rate position in the masculine, patriarchal, hierarchically structured institutions. They experienced that the church, which saw it as her task to bring the Gospel message of redemption and liberation into the world, had little eye for the liberation of women in the church itself. An equal place for women and men in all life-expressions in the community of the church would be, of course, a vital condition for the credibility of the church.

However, as women discovered, in church thought and actions, in official documents, in preaching and in education, outdated stereotypical views still held pride of place. Such concepts were even theologically 'legitimised' instead of being rejected as unevangelical. Traditionally in the church a patriarchal image of 'mankind and world' prevailed, in which woman was subordinated to man according to the Divine order of creation. Thomas Aquinas had likewise contributed to this negative concept; based on the physiological-philosophical ideas of Aristotle, he saw woman as a '*mas occasionatus*'²¹, a 'defective human being'. Indeed, this concept of the inferiority of women had up till then held sway in all fields of the life of the Roman Catholic Church:

- ? The Code of Canon Law of 1918 (which remained in force until 1983) contained clauses discriminating against women. Thus it was stated that for baptism a priest

²¹ Sent. 20,2,1,1: *De Veritate* 5, 9 ad 9; S.Th.I q.92.a.1; q.99.a.2

took precedence above a deacon, a deacon above a sub deacon, a clergyman above a layperson and a man above a woman (Canon 742.2). When there was no man who could serve at the Eucharistic celebration, a woman was allowed to take it upon her but she could only respond from a distance and on no account was she allowed to draw near to the altar (Canon 813.3). Preaching in church and controlling the goods of the parish were also forbidden for women (Canon 1327 and 1521). The highest church distinction that could be conferred upon women was the *'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.'* (In protest against this limitation, Rie Vendrik refused to accept that papal distinction when it was awarded to her.)

- ? Women could not find expression of their female experience and spirituality in the liturgy, in the language of faith and prayer, in the traditional symbols and images of God.
- ? In internal church structures, in matters of governing and policy, women were hardly recognised, or only for subordinate tasks. They could not participate in discussions about important church matters or about the great social needs that should concern the church. The Second Vatican Council at first only allowed male lay-persons (*ex ordine laicorum viri catholici*) as observers and even the world renowned British economist Barbara Ward had to allow her paper about development aid to be presented to the Council Fathers by a man.²² Only after a letter from a number of women was sent to Pope Paul VI requesting the admission of lay women as auditors were a handful of women (among them two Dutch participants: Anna Maria Roeloffzen and Rie Vendrik) invited for the third session.
- ? Although many women had long since fulfilled tasks in the church, which are regarded as the work of deacons, they were excluded from the ordained ministry. According to Canon 968.1, only a baptised male can receive a valid ordination. The theologian Jean Daniélou made an optimistic submission in 1965 that the Catholic Church would admit women to the ministry of deacons before the end of the Council. During the Council itself Mgr. Hallinan, Archbishop of Atlanta in the U.S.A., proposed that women be allowed to fulfil the function of acolyte and lector, to proclaim the Gospel and to administer baptism. He also pleaded for the ordination of women as deacons.²³ In the opinion of a number of prominent theologians (e.g., Rahner and Schillebeeckx) there were no valid theological-biblical and dogmatic arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood. Haye van der Meer, S. J., wrote in his thesis in 1962 that no proof could be found in favour of ordination of women but that the theological arguments against the ordination of women were scientifically unjustified and moreover demonstrated the exaggerated opinion of it maintained by the clergy.²⁴ The arguments against were rather of a psychological, traditional socio-cultural and emotional nature. This exclusion from the ordained ministry was experienced as discrimination by a number of faithful women, not only for themselves but also for the whole community of believers because 'the essence of man and woman is so strongly

²² Sr. A.M. McGrath, *Women and the Church*, New York 1976, 8.

²³ Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy, *Guests in their own House. The Women of Vatican II*, New York 1996, 153-155. 'Paul Hallinan was the only American bishop to speak publicly for the cause of women, and he went further than others in specifying practical ways for implementing doctrines of women's dignity and full human equality' (153).

²⁴ H. van der Meer, *Priestertum der Frau*, a thesis under Karl Rahner, Innsbrück 1962, later redrafted as *Women Priests in the Catholic Church, a Theological-Historical Investigation*. Philadelphia 1974. It is striking that van der Meer was to consider this conviction of his later as a 'youthful sin'.

- joined together, the one as well as the other is wounded when one of them within a certain community cannot give the full measure of his/her possibilities’
- ? Also the church views on sexuality shown, for example, in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* were cause for frustration in women. The use of the contraceptive pill and other new methods was already quite common among catholic women. That the only contraception allowed by Pope Paul was the method of periodic abstinence shook many in their faith in the Catholic Church. The majority of women did not accept the views in this encyclical.

Many women were so much disappointed and felt so frustrated by ecclesiastical discrimination that they turned their backs on the Catholic Church and decided to use their talents and energy in other ways in society. Beside this exodus of women there were others who remained loyal to the Catholic Church and saw it as a challenge to co-operate with this church for renewal and change. Of course not all women were so concerned with ‘women and church’; there were those who were confused and insecure and others who opposed changes. ‘But,’ wrote the Dutch Episcopacy in *Renewal and Confusion* in their Lenten letter of 1968, ‘renewal is not possible without confusion and insecurity’ and encouragingly they added further on: ‘It takes courage to accept that everywhere where God sends his Holy Spirit the re-creation and renewal which we need, takes place’.

II.3.2 Vatican II and Papal Pronouncements

Meanwhile in the Catholic Church there were already some hopeful signs. Whereas earlier John XXIII still stated that the purpose for which the Creator had intended women was motherhood, in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) he recognised as a sign of the times that “women take their place in society and that they demand to be treated as human persons with rights and duties in the state as well as in family life”.

Although Vatican II did not often mention women, and the use of language was here and there still not woman-friendly (the faithful were ‘fili’ and ‘viri’) in *Lumen Gentium*, the Church was considered to be a community in which all (women and men) have the same fundamental dignity. Discrimination on grounds of sex was rejected. ‘In the Church there is no inequality on account of race, class or sex’ (nr.32). *Gaudium et Spes* also rejected every form of discrimination. Women had the same right to schooling and cultural development; they were free to choose their own life status, and to participate in the life of society.

Apostolicam Actuositatem stated: ‘Whereas women nowadays take active part in all the life of society, it is very important that they also participate more and more widely in all fields of the apostolate of the Church’ (A.A. 1.9). This was in striking contrast to the new regulations concerning the priesthood that Pope Paul VI promulgated in the *Motu Proprio Ministeria Quaedam* on 15 August 1972, in which the functions of lector and acolyte were assigned to laypersons but ‘according to the venerable tradition of the Church’ only to male laypersons. One is speechless regarding the papal pronouncements in which women were put high on a pedestal by means of exalted lyrical musings:

‘In our eyes Woman is a reflection of transcendental beauty, a symbol of limitless goodness, a mirror of the ideal human being as God conceived it in his

own image and likeness. In our eyes Woman is the vision of virginal purity that evokes from the human heart the highest emotional and moral sentiments. In our eyes, she is for Man in his loneliness the companion whose life is one of unreserved loving dedication, resourceful collaboration and help, courageous fidelity and daily heroic sacrifice. In our eyes she is the Mother – let us bow in reverence before her! – the mysterious source of life, through whom nature still receives the breath of God creator of the immortal soul.... In our eyes she symbolises mankind itself.’²⁵

On the one hand woman was set on the highest throne by the church authorities, but on the other hand, she was limited in her development by pinning her down to centuries-old beliefs and cultural patterns. Nevertheless the developments in the Catholic Church continued and were even stronger where the self-assurance of women in social life was growing.

The World Lay Congress in Rome (1967-68) adopted a resolution about women in which the wish was expressed that the church would grant women their full rights and responsibilities as christians and that serious dogmatic studies would be made on the position of women in the Sacramental Order. The Congress also demanded that ‘competent women be included in all Pontifical Commissions and that qualified women be consulted on the revision of church laws concerning women, so that their dignity will be fully taken into account and so that greater responsibility will be given to all women serving in the church’.

II.3.3 Women in the Church Discover Each Other

Soon after the Vatican Council a stream of actions began as women, and a number of men as well, set to work with energy and creativity in several countries, focussing on issues around women in the Catholic Church. Of the many groups and organisations involved, only some of the better known will be mentioned here:

- a. The ‘*St. Joan’s International Alliance*’, actually founded in 1911 by English suffragettes, took a stand for the rights of women in the Catholic Church in 1959. During an international conference in 1963 this society carried a motion stating ‘...in case the Church in her wisdom would in the course of time admit women to the priesthood, some women of this organisation would gladly and urgently offer themselves as candidates’. In 1969 the St. Joan’s Alliance went a step further; at its congress in Versailles a resolution was passed in which the Catholic Church was asked ‘to recognise the vocation of women to the priesthood as legitimate and feasible
- b. Likewise, the *World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisation* (WUCWO), co-ordinating almost all catholic women’s organisations in the world, spoke up. In 1968/69 it organised an international study meeting about ‘Woman and Church Law’. In a memorandum addressed, among others, to the Roman commission in charge of the revision of Canon Law, it demanded that ‘all articles of canons which are discriminatory against women should be deleted or changed’.²⁶

²⁵ See: Nadine Foley, ‘Women in Vatican Documents 1960 and up’, In: James A. Coriden (ed.), *Sexism and Church Law*, New York 1977, 106.

²⁶ Memorandum in *Women make an Appeal to the Pastors of the Church*, in *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 108, 1987/1, 6.

- c. In 1970 the very active international group '*Femmes et Hommes dans l'Eglise*' was founded. It distinguished itself from the beginning by its critical studies and scientific publications. It also exhorted the well over 100 theologians, who participated in the international congress of the monthly publication *Concilium*, to take the cause of women to heart. The success of this request was evident in a resolution of the congress: '...the discrimination practised in the Church with regard to women must also be rejected. It is high time to look seriously at the role of women in the ministry of the Church.'²⁷
- d. German catholic women also raised their voices in the '*Aktionsgemeinschaft für verantwortliche Mitarbeit der Frau in der katholischen Kirche*'. This document aimed at raising the consciousness of women and wanted to stimulate women – together with men – to carry responsibility in church and society. There was a further objective of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the Catholic Church authorities about the potential of women to undertake tasks and functions in the Church.
- e. In the United States female religious were the first to take a stand for women in the church. In 1971 the *National Coalition of American Nuns* drafted a five-year plan with as goal the recognition of full-equality of women and men in the Catholic Church, including priesthood. (Seen from our time, this was an extremely optimistic expectation.) The *National Assembly of Religious Women* and the *Leadership Conference of Women Religious* took public stands for an equal position of women in the Church.²⁸
- f. For the first time women theologians spoke up, the most prominent among these being Nell Morton, Letty Russel, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Daly and Ida Raming.

It was typical of most of these women's movements to be quite ecumenical; they sought and made contact with women and groups from other Christian churches. By going back to the sources, to the situation of women in the early church, women from different denominations discovered each other. They experienced that they often had the same problems, questions and longings. For this reason the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Secretariat for Unity and the Roman Council for the Laity, founded a '*Groupe de Liaison Féminine Oecuménique*'. This group organised, for example, seminars on the images of women in the media; it also established thorough documentation on the issues it handled.

In 1974 in Berlin the *Women-Desk* of the World Council of Churches²⁹ held a conference with the theme 'Sexism in the 1970's – Women: a Majority as Minority'. Women from different churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, participated and met each other in the common endeavour to promote women in church work and to get rid of sexist language and images in church

²⁷ Report of the International Congress.

²⁸ Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women, a Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority*, San Francisco 1985, 71-144.

²⁹ The World Council of Churches had already in 1949 founded a commission '*Life and Work of Women in the Church*'. This commission was replaced by the '*Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society*'. In 1973 this Department was replaced by the '*Women-Desk*'.

documents and liturgies. They also recommended that more women take up the study of theology.³⁰

The international ecumenical colloquium on 'New Forms of Ministries in Christian Communities' was also important. It was organized by the International Study- and Informationcentre *Pro MundiVita* (Brussels) in Louvain-Heverlee from 14 til 19 September 1973. 120 participants from 32 countries, cardinals, bishops and delegates from different denominations, studied together with 'ordinary' lay people, focussing on new forms and possible experiments in ministry. Out of the nine work groups, one was devoted to the theme 'Collaboration of Man and Woman in the Church'. One of the five general resolutions of this colloquium spoke of 'the acceptance of women in all church ministries'³¹.

II.3.4 Women in the Church in the Netherlands

In Europe, the Netherlands was one of the first countries where women spoke up³². Catharina Halkes was one of the most notable; her book *Storm na de Stilte (The Storm after the Lull)*³³ shook many women in the Dutch Church because they recognised themselves in it. The first two editions sold out very quickly and a German translation soon followed. The book motivated women to strive for more participation and responsibility in the church.

An important initiative in 1967 was the formation by the Willibrord Association, in co-operation with the Horstink, of the study-group '*Samenwerking van Man en Vrouw in de Kerk*' (Co-operation of Man and Woman in the Church). This group had a pioneering function and saw as its goal: 'the creation and promotion of a co-operation of man and woman as genuinely equal partners, who carry equal responsibility in all expressions of church life in conformity with the message of the Gospel and taking into consideration the constant evolution of behavioural patterns in society'³⁴. From the beginning the direction of the group was clearly ecumenical. Similar problems concerning the co-operation of women and men were common to various denominations, although in the Dutch Reformed churches the Ministry had recently been opened to women.

Ecumenical contacts were not limited to the Netherlands. International relations were brought about, among others with the *Department on Co-operation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society* from the *World Council of Churches*. In co-operation with the *International Grail Movement* a 'Seminar on Co-operation of Men and Women in Church and Society' was held in the Grailcentre 'the Tiltenberg', Vogelenzang, Netherlands, in September 1969. Many experts, but also other persons interested in feminism and Christianity, got together for study and exchange of

³⁰ *Sexism in the 1970's: Discrimination against Women, a Report of World Council of Churches Consultation West Berlin 1974*, Geneva 1975.

³¹ See: *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 50, 1974, and : *Femmes et Hommes dans l'Eglise*, Nr. 6-7, septembre-décembre 1973, 4-6.

³² One finds a survey of the developments in the Netherlands in: Catharina J.M. Halkes and Annelies van Heijst, *New Catholic Women in the Netherlands*, in: Anne Brotherton, *The Voice of the Turtledove. New Catholic Women in Europe*. New York 1992, 149-170.

³³ C. Govaart-Halkes, *Storm na de Stilte, De plaats van de vrouw in de kerk*, Utrecht 1964.

³⁴ This group was composed of the following peoples: T. Govaart-Halkes, (President), J.P.M. van Dam, (Secretary), R.J.A. van Eyden, F. Haarsma, L.M. Simons and M.H.C. Vendrik.

experiences³⁵.

Likewise there were meetings with women studying theology at the different universities. This was already a first attempt at creating a research on Feministic Theology.

The Willibrord Association also saw as its task to be present at the Dutch Pastoral Council, to follow it closely, and to prepare preliminary studies for the fifth session in which the sacerdotal functions were to be discussed.

II.3.5 Dutch Pastoral Council and Women

The presence of women at the Pastoral Council (1968-1970) was still minimal. Although at least half of the faithful were women, from the 205 participants at this Council only 44 were women. During the fifth plenary session the question of 'Women and Priestly Ministry' was raised. After ample and open discussions the following recommendations concerning women and priestly ministry were accepted:

- ? It is important that women be speedily admitted to all those tasks in which their nomination is not at all, or very little problematic. Further development should aim at the acceptance of women in all church functions, including the celebration of the Eucharist.
- a. In those cases in which the present church law contains an explicit prohibitive regulation, the complete abolition thereof should forcefully be requested.
- b. Research should be done about the acceptance in the community (i.e. amongst the faithful members) of women priests and, more precisely about motivations for resistance to this change.
- c. Potential emotional resistance of believers must be met with well-balanced information, which is already abundantly available in the literature.
- d. Note must be taken of the insight and experiences concerning the pastoral work of women that other churches have.

At the vote it appeared that one bishop (Mgr. Ernst) was in favour of the recommendation, four were against and three abstained. The total result was: 72 votes in favour, 8 against and 24 abstentions.

It appears from these figures that not only women made a stand for the church as a 'community of equal disciples' in which they could function in all church ministries, but that a growing number of men, even on the highest ecclesiastical level, shared in this desire of women. That fact was also obvious, for example, in the Synod of Bishops in 1971 in Rome where 'women and ministry' received a good deal of attention.

II.4 A Synod of Bishops with a 'Ticklish' Problem

With its rejection of all discrimination Vatican II had raised the hope of actual consequences for the recognition of women in church functions. However, although women carried more and more responsibility on parochial, diocesan and national levels, little or nothing was done by the highest ecclesiastical authorities in Rome to actualise

³⁵ Report of the Seminar *Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society*, September 9 – 12 1969.

the declaration and decrees about women as expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. There had been special hope for clear statements concerning women and priestly ministry, the more so as in various other churches women already were serving in the Ministry, or at least the possibility thereof was the subject of study. And, as previously mentioned, the World Lay Congress had also expressed in 1967 the wish that a serious doctrinal study should be undertaken about the place of women in the Sacramental Order and in the Church.

It was especially the *Synod of Bishops* in Rome (1971) that called for the creation of an official study-commission about women. The two themes of this synod (where twenty women from the whole world were present, among them Pilar Bellosilo) were: the 'Priestly Ministry' and 'Justice in the World'.

In the discussion of the first subject, 'Priestly Ministry', several bishops already began to ask attention for the role of women in church functions. Among these were Cardinal Suenens of Belgium, Archbishop Plourdes of Ottawa and Mgr. Tepe from Brazil.

The intervention of Cardinal Flahiff of Winnipeg on 11 October made such a great impression that the synod could simply not avoid the question of women priests. Cardinal Flahiff spoke not only on behalf of the Canadian Bishops' Conference but also on behalf of catholic women in Canada. They had, sometime before the synod, approached the bishops with their wish that the Holy Father would as quickly as possible create a commission to study the position of women in the church, in the light of the signs of the time, and taking into account existing experiences of women in church tasks and functions³⁶.

The intervention of Cardinal Flahiff received the backing of several others, such as Cardinal Poma on behalf of the Italian episcopacy, Mgr. Schmitt on behalf of the French episcopacy, Mgr. Tepe from Brazil and Mgr. Byrne, Archbishop of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Mgr. Carter of Kingston asked to include in the study the admittance of women to the priesthood. Mgr. Gram, Bishop of Oslo, was the only one who proposed to entrust this study to the International Theological Commission. Patriarch Maximos V Hakim asked to devote the next Synod of Bishops to the place of women in the church and the role of religious in the administration of the church, in the Curia, in synod meetings and in other church functions. "Women" he said, "received the mission to announce to Peter and the others that Jesus was alive. If we listen now to women of our time, they very likely also have an important message from the Lord to report to us."

These positive voices showed that many dioceses wanted more attention given to the position of women in the church, and this not only for the sake of women but also for the sake of the life of the whole church as the People of God. Of course there were also some opponents, such as Cardinal Shipyi, Archbishop of the Ukraine, who thought that women could not be admitted to the priesthood for biblical and traditional reasons.

³⁶ On 17 and 18 April 1971 a conference of Canadian catholic women took place and on 19 April 60 women held an official meeting with 65 bishops. Mrs. J. Matthews and Cardinal Flahiff were in the chair. A recommendation came up from the meeting, to demand the coming Bishop's Synod in Rome to strike out from Canon Law all the discriminating clauses against women, and to ordain, in the future, capable women in church ministries. Women should also take a place on all church bodies, and a wish was expressed for changing the attitude of priests regarding women, sexuality and marriage. All bishops except one assistant bishop agreed with this recommendation.

The request to create a study commission about women was taken up in the report of the synod:

43. We insist that women get their own part in responsibility and participation in the communal life of society and also in the Church.

44. We propose that a profound study should be undertaken on this subject, using thereby all appropriate means, e.g., the creation of a mixed commission of men and women, religious and lay, from different social backgrounds and professions.³⁷

It is striking to notice that the discussion about women was mainly held within the framework of the first theme 'Function of the Ministerial Priesthood', whereas the recommendation for a study-commission was taken up in the second theme 'Justice in the World'. Was this meant as a suggestion that the study should not only be directed at women in the church? Rie Vendrik wrote about this proposal:

'When one rereads the original intervention of Cardinal Flahiff, one gets the impression that a strong shift took place with regard to his original intention, i.e. from careful consideration of future possibilities for women in ministry and pastoral tasks, to the more general question of the emancipation of women in society and church.'³⁸

One notices that the text for the first vote ran: 'that women will get responsibility and participation, *equal to that of men*, in the sacramental life of the church'. At the next vote this text changed to: 'that women get *their own* part in the responsibility, etc....'³⁹ Was there a fear that accepting the first text would open the door to women priests? In any case, the request for a study-commission on women in church and society had been clearly stated.

Now it was the Pope's turn.

³⁷ Wolfgang Beinert, *Frauenbefreiung und Kirche* (Women's liberation and Church), Regensburg 1987, 137.

³⁸ Rie Vendrik, Pauselijke studiecommissie over de vrouw in de samenleving en in de kerk (*Pontifical Study Commission on Women in Society and in the Church*) In: *Kosmos en Oekumene*, 8, jrg. 1974, Nr. 4-5, 104.

³⁹ H.Fesquet, see: *Le Monde*, 7 November 1971.