

Chapter V

Preparing the Final Report

V.1. Report to the Synod of Bishops

During the month of July, some Roman commission members continued to work on the documents intended for the Pope. During August Mgr. Bartoletti presented to the Pope in Castel Gandolfo this dossier which contained the documents and reports of the meetings, even though they were still provisional and unfinished. He also gave the Pope a personal memorandum: 'La question des femmes et des ministères ordonnés'. In this paper he informed the Pope about important developments concerning the question of ordination for women. The work of the study commission was suspect from two sides: the conservatives saw it as threatening to open access of women to the priesthood while the progressives rejected the commission as a waste of time and avoidance of the real questions. There was no single argument for the exclusion of women from the lay ministères as lector and acolyte. If a negative answer had to be given on the ordination of women for the priesthood, it should be clarified with sound ecclesiological argumentation from church teaching. There is something to be said for the ordination of woman as deacons, he suggested, particularly given the ecumenical dimension of the question. More and more women are involved in the study of various theological disciplines. In any case, qualified women should participate in all future research and in the formulation of the answers to these questions. "Their co-operation is needed in order to find a language adapted to the modern mentality."¹

On 10 September 1974 Claire Delva and Vitoria Pinheiro wrote a letter to Mgr. Bartoletti on behalf of the 'group of five'. They informed him that they had written a letter to the Pope which stated that they could no longer participate in the commission unless the working methods changed substantially.

At the beginning of October Claire Delva met Cardinal Suenens in Rome. He told her: "Your letter has arrived at the addressee, so the president told me; he himself had also read this letter. "They are very much put out (*Ils sont très ennuyé*)".²

From 27 September to 26 October 1974, a Synod of Bishops was held in Rome with the theme: 'Evangelisation of the Modern World'. During one of the last days of this synod, on 23 October, Mgr. Bartoletti gave an account of the work of the 'Study Commission on Women in Society and in the Church'.³ Present from the commission were Sister Claire, Rosemary Goldie and De la Potterie.

¹ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 642-643. This memorandum was never published. Hebblethwaite was allowed to see it by Rosemary Goldie.

² See letter of Claire Delva to the other four, 21 October 1974.

³ This Synod of Bishops resulted in a fiasco. On 22 October 192 of the 211 participants rejected the draft of a final report. Burning questions which the bishops themselves had brought up were hardly mentioned in the final report. The Synod of Bishops refused to approve a final text in which the views and proposals of the bishops were neutralised and changed to vague generalities. Did the Vatican believe that the day after this disappointment would be a good moment to report on the study commission on women? This commission was, after all, established in response to a proposal of the previous Synod of Bishops in 1971. Did they hope to demonstrate that Rome really took into account the wishes of the bishops?

Mgr. Bartoletti first outlined the creation, objectives, working methods and tasks of the commission. He insisted that it was not within the mandate of the commission to concern itself with the question of women's ordination nor with the 'ministères non-ordonnés'.

Next he briefly explained the activities of the study commission and that, after three plenary sessions, a provisional draft had been drawn up on the theme '**The Human Being, Man and Woman, in God's Plan**'. This text consisted of two parts: 1. A contribution from the life sciences, written by the physician Mrs. Graber-Duvernay in consultation with a group in Paris and 2. a theological/biblical contribution formulated by De la Potterie, Mollat, Grasso and Toinet. This study on the human being had still to be amplified with elements from philosophical and theological anthropology.

The commission had also concerned itself with the participation of women in pastoral responsibilities in the church and had formulated some recommendations on this subject. Although not yet complete, the results thus far obtained showed the main lines of a new vision of the human being, man and woman, faithful to the traditional teaching of the church and conscious of the positive values of the 'emancipation of women'. The commission let itself be inspired by God's Word. Revelation explicitly confirms the equality of man and woman as human persons before God. The Scripture, however, clearly shows differences between man and woman, in the sense of complementarity.

There is a principle of unity which says that man and woman are conceived ("*conçus*") in the creative thought of God: "in the image of God he created him" (Gen.1: 27) *and* a principle of difference: the human person is not a philosophical idea but takes on a body: "male and female He created them". In the human being body and spirit are closely related; sexuality characterises the whole person. Modern anthropology needed to do a more in-depth study on this subject. A theological study was also needed to further investigate the mystery of man and woman in their relation to the trinity and to the church. Both Maryology and the relation of man and woman to their culture were areas that called for further study and contributions from sociology were still needed in order to give actual perspectives.

The apostolic 'exhortatio' of Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), had been enthusiastically received by the commission members. In this document Mary was seen as the new woman and perfect Christian, who united in herself the most typical situations in the life of women.

Three matters still required further research:

1. A study on the ministères non-ordonnés and their relationship to other forms of engagement in the church, *and* a clear specification of terms such as 'ministère', 'apostolate', 'service', etc.;
2. The possible participation of baptised but non-ordained lay people in ecclesiastical courts;
3. An accountable answer to the question of the admission of women to the priesthood which would be not only disciplinary but also well-supported by ecclesiological argumentation.⁴

After Mgr. Bartoletti had finished his account, questions were asked by nine Synod Fathers, namely: Patriarch Cheiko, Mgr. Durand, Mgr. Hermanink, Cardinal Wojtyla, Mgr. Lamont, Cardinal Suenens, Mgr. Ruhuna, Père Lecuyer and Cardinal Garrone. The content of their questions as well as the responses were not released to the press.

The bishops received the following **recommendations** from the commission (briefly summarised):

⁴ During a round-table talk in November 1975, organised by the Vatican in relation to the participation of the church in the International Year of Women, Mgr. Bartoletti remarked, 'All we may expect from such a response is to hear why this ordination cannot be allowed'. Cited in *National Catholic News Service*, 24 November 1975.

I. *Participation*

1. Participation of women in responsible positions in the church:
 - ? individually in local communities;
 - ? in ecclesiastical organisations;
 - ? as advisors to or members of the governing bodies of the Roman Curia.
2. Participation of women in ecclesiastical bodies for study, planning, decision-making and evaluation in parishes and dioceses, on national and international levels.
3. Stimulation of the involvement of 'Religious' in the work of evangelisation
4. Study by Bishops' Conferences on the possibility for ministères non-ordonnés for lay people, women as well as men.

II. *Training and Education:*

1. A change of mentality with regard to women. This is especially important for priests.
2. Attention to the spiritual training of women.⁵

V.2. **Commentary**

- ? It was not a simple task for Mgr. Bartoletti to speak about the study commission at this moment in the Synod when the bishops were in a negative mood. This may explain why his account of the work of the study commission was so optimistic in tone and created the impression that all commission members were unanimous in their views. He failed to note that the two texts he mentioned did not receive unanimous approval, for five women had abstained from voting. He also omitted any mention of the fundamental criticism from within the commission of its working methods and leadership. Even less did he mention the letter containing this criticism which had been sent to the Pope the month before.
- ? The 'new vision of man and woman' which the president presented had certainly not received the approval of all members of the commission. Several among them were rather of the opinion that the prevailing ideas within the commission meant a retrograde step after Vaticanum II.
- ? *Marialis Cultus* had hardly been touched on by the commission. The president and De la Potterie had each only mentioned it once. It was actually Pilar Bellosillo who, in her - rejected - intervention on cultural anthropology, referred to this document in which the Vatican had in certain passages employed an anthropological approach, taking into account the socio-cultural evolution of women. De la Potterie had then remarked: "*Marialis Cultus* is meant for the stimulation of devotion and is thus not a dogmatic text about Mary". This document simply did not, in his opinion, fit in to the theological reflection of the study commission. *Marialis Cultus* held up Mary as an example for all Christians, and not, as De la Potterie and Le Guillou preferred, an example for women.
- ? At the end of his account Mgr. Bartoletti indicated that a further study about a possible admittance of women to the priesthood as well as research on the ministères non-ordonnés was needed. This may seem inconsistent with what he stated at the beginning of his account, but it is not so because in Curial thinking 'further study' does not mean: See whether change can be justified, but rather: Confirm more clearly what is definite and cannot be changed.

⁵ For the report presented to the Synod of Bishops, see '*Femmes et Hommes dans l'Eglise*', No. 11, 1974, 16-26. It is remarkable that the Synod of Bishops, which after all was an interested party in this subject given the request of the Synod of 1971, did nothing with the information or the recommendations presented to them.

? Only nine Synod Fathers asked questions; the contents of which are unknown to us. It is surprising that there seemed to be little interest shown by the bishops, particularly as it was the Bishops' Synod in 1971 which asked for the foundation of a study commission. Could this not indicate that the Synod Fathers had little confidence in a Vatican study commission?

V. 3. The 'Group of Five'

For the 'group of five' a time of waiting had come, during which they corresponded frequently with each other.

They clearly had little heart for attending the next plenary meeting. Pilar wrote: "When I see myself there at that table, discussing dogmatic questions with the same faces in front of me, I have no courage any more".⁶ Claire expressed the same feelings: "My husband and some other people tell me that I have to do everything possible to stay in the commission, but they have not experienced the situation there...."⁷

The five were plagued by ambivalent feelings and they asked themselves what they ought to do if no reply to their letter, or a negative one, should arrive. Rie wrote: "If they send us no answer, I do not think that we could return to Rome".⁸ Time went by and there was still no reply. The five did not want to take a decision without any word from Rome and decided to get together. One week before the beginning of the next plenary session, Pilar, Vitoria and Rie joined Claire in Lasne (Belgium) from 24-26 November.

Professor Thils advised the five to go to the general meeting, at least to maintain solidarity with the other members. The five did not fully agree with this idea. On 25 November, at 10.00 p.m., Claire phoned Mgr. Bartoletti to ask if there might be an answer on the way. The president was certain that a letter from Mgr. Benelli, of the Vatican Secretariat of State, had been sent to her eight days previously. However, the postal services in Italy were on strike. Mgr. Bartoletti advised Claire to contact Mgr. Cardinale, the papal nuncio in Brussels the next morning, but, when they phoned the nunciature the next morning, there was no word from Rome. However, Mgr. Cardinale informed them very kindly that the Vatican courier was expected that same day. If Claire would come to the nunciature that evening, the reply would surely be there.

When Claire and Pilar arrived that evening, an answer had indeed been received. The Nuncio read them a message that had been written with pencil on a little card. The two copied every word down exactly:

"From several points of view it would be very detrimental if the five withdrew themselves.

The message comes from the Pope himself.

He has carefully studied the question in the letter.

He wishes that the five members reverse their decision and continue to be open to all opinions, out of respect for the teaching of the Church. Take into account the expertise of the other members of the commission, in order to avoid obstacles that might hinder the dialogue"⁹

Signed by 'Le Vigilant.'

⁶ Letter of 25 October.

⁷ Letter of 28 October.

⁸ Letter of 29 October.

⁹ 'Il serait très dommageable si les cinq membres demissionent à bien des points de vue.

Le message vient de Sainte Père Lui-même.

Il a examiné attentivement la question de la lettre.

That same day Claire received a telegram from Rome:

“Answer to your letter sent. Hope presence members next week. Bartoletti.”¹⁰

That same evening Claire and Pilar informed the president, in a letter, that they would indeed be present at the next meeting. They also requested a place on the agenda for an explanation of their groups’ objections.

V.4. The Last Period

It had been announced during the third plenary session that the following general meetings would have a different character.

The president explained at the beginning of the fourth session that their study commission, together with the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the International Catholic Organisation and some ‘dicastères’ of the Holy See, were to prepare the Catholic Church’s contribution to the International Year of Women and the World Conference on Women in June/July 1975 in Mexico. The original members of the study commission on women would simultaneously, in separate meetings, draw up a Final Document which would be presented to the Pope.

The commission had thus become one with twin objectives.

The remainder of this study will focus only on the meetings in which the Final Document was formulated.

V.4.1. The Fourth Plenary Session

1. The meeting of 2-5 December 1974
2. Commentary
3. The ‘Group of Five’

V.4.1.1. The Meeting of 2 - 5 December 1974¹¹

Although Le Guillou was present again, his replacement Toinet also attended this meeting. At the request of the Scandinavian Bishops’ Conference, Mrs. Inger Saxild from Denmark was admitted to the meetings as an auditor. Mrs. Eugenie Bahintchie from Nigeria complained that she was the only African representative, whereas yet another European from the Nordic countries was allowed to join in the meetings.

Mgr. Bartoletti announced at the beginning of the meeting that he had presented the ‘still provisional and incomplete’ documents to the Pope in August but failed to mention that he had also given the Pope a personal memo. He did then report on his presentation of the study commission during the Bishop’s Synod.

In the meantime, he had asked on behalf of the study commission the International Theological Commission and the Pontifical Biblical Commission to take over the theological-exegetical work of the study commission, on the basis that this belonged more to the competence of those bodies. Moreover, two members of the study commission, Hamel and Le Guillou, were also members of the International Theological Commission and De la Potterie was a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

Il souhaite que les cinq membres reviennent sur leur décision et continuent de rester à l’écoute de toutes tendances, dans respect de la doctrine de l’Eglise.

Tenir compte de la compétence des autres membres de la commission pour éviter des blocages qui paraît empêcher le dialogue. (signed by : ‘Le Vigilant’)

¹⁰ ‘Réponse votre lettre envoyé. Espère presence membres semaine prochain, Bartoletti.’

¹¹ Vitoria Pinheiro was absent with notice.

The first discussion concerned the report on the preceding meeting. Rie Vendrik remarked that some interventions had been recorded in Italian and Spanish without a French translation. She also expressed her concern about the continually 'provisional' quality of the documents which was emphasised so much in the report.

The text of the report was approved with seven votes in favour and five abstentions.

Hereafter Pilar Bellosillo read out a statement from the 'group of five', about which she remarked that it was not their desire to provoke a polemic, nor to let another point of view prevail, and even less to seek agreement from the others. The intention was simple: "We want to share with you our thoughts after the experiences of the preceding meetings".

This statement corresponded with the content of their letter to the Pope (see Chapter IV).

At first there was no reaction on this comprehensive statement. It was deadly silent for a moment and then the group proceeded to the designated subjects of the commission.¹²

Sister Teresa was the only one who asked questions about entrusting the work of the study commission to other commissions. She feared that an important study was thus swept under the carpet ("*sous le tapis*"). She also expressed her concern about the small group that would further elaborate the documents of the study commission. "These persons cannot reflect the views of the entire people of God".

In his response the president explained that, because of the disquiet in the commission about certain texts, he had felt obliged to ask more competent commissions to take these subjects in hand. This request had already been accepted and the matter was on the agenda of the International Theological Commission.

At that point Mgr. Bartoletti spoke at length about the criticism of the 'group of five' as presented by Pilar Bellosillo. He understood their feelings of uneasiness: "However, this kind of work will not be accomplished without suffering ("*la souffrance ne peut pas manquer*")"; our seriousness, our unselfishness and our sincere contribution to the life of faith in the church is measured hereby."

Concerning the complaints of the five:

The contributions from outside, brought along by the 'group of five', had changed, even impoverished, the first biblical document. Those contributions had nevertheless also demonstrated the gaps in the first commission text, especially in the field of anthropology. The presence of different approaches was clearly stated in the commission document for the Pope and that in a positive sense. Therefore the criticism of the 'group of five' on that count was out of place. The contributions of the five were the fruits of a theological pluralism that one could find at this moment in time in the church, but those texts contained views which were not acceptable in the light of God's Word, the Tradition and the teachings of the church.

Concerning the working methods: everything possible would be done to improve these. At the end of his admonition the president said: "Let us hope that this moment of suffering and crisis in our midst may be at the same time a moment of courageously going forward. We can regard the episode as closed in order to give ourselves thus the possibility to resume the commission's work with greater clarity and efficiency, and with the grace of the Lord".

¹² After this meeting some women expressed accord with the objections of the 'group of five', e.g. Sr. Theresa. McLeod and Deborah Schellman. Sr. Theresa had earlier expressed her criticism in an interview in which she maintained that the Vatican, in creating the study commission, had followed a typical governing procedure: 'In order to bury something, one creates a commission'. About the male members in the commission she said, 'They don't amount to anything; most of them are priests from Rome,' although she made an exception for the president. In *The Tablet*, 29 November 1975.

During the last morning some documents were presented which were meant to supplement the incomplete and provisional document presented to the Pope in August. These texts are briefly summarised here:

Some Philosophical Considerations on the Ecclesiastical Promotion of Women by Le Guillou and Toinet.

The two authors deal in this text with the four most important debatable points that a theologian can encounter concerning the position of women in the church:

1. The apparent concession made by certain biblical authors, especially Paul, to a dominant masculine mentality that is unfavourable to women and their equality with men.
2. The real scope of many symbolic expressions, by which in The Scripture man and woman are placed in relation to each other, to Christ and to God.
3. The distance between 'cultural horizons' which are historically of the past and which rings through the biblical witness *and* the horizon of humanity en route to globalisation in which discrimination against women is rejected.
4. The question regarding the position of women in the Roman Catholic Church is related to the aforementioned points.

With regard to the last point, several questions often asked in modern times came up:

- ? Is it not time that new possibilities for feminine values and for women themselves should appear in the church, not in order for women to command or dominate but to serve there according to the fullness of their christian vocation?
- ? The hierarchical system of the church, in which the guiding principle is clearly masculine, excludes women from certain types of offices. From there, directly or indirectly, other discrimination follows. How can the church justify a systematic, definitive subordination of women in the hierarchical church on the basis of some sort of 'order of things', supposedly theologically founded on God's will? Does this not mean in practice that the equality of human beings is denied in God's name?

Le Guillou and Toinet stated in their answer that the exclusion of women from certain ecclesiastical offices has nothing to do with discrimination. It is connected with the diversity of tasks and services, corresponding to the natural qualities of men and women. Although Christ transcended the discriminatory attitudes of his time towards women, he only chose his apostles among men. That was based on essential reasons and not simply on what was convenient.

Above all, the Incarnation took place in a masculine human being. That means first of all that only men can authentically represent the God-man in his function as mediator. For this representation of His God-human mediatorship, God chose whom He wants. That is not unjust because everything happens according to 'providential' grace. So, God chooses whom he wants to function as a representation, which the trinity has freely created in humanity, namely those who in their person-structure carry the image of divine fatherhood, the mystery by which He himself is the revealer through his Son ("who sees me sees the Father"), who is as the new Adam from whom springs the Church as bride.

The paths which might seem closed to women in the church are not paths but dead ends. God never meant these to be real paths in his plan of creation and redemption. On the contrary, He has from the beginning, in Mary and after her in the church, opened a destination for women which has never been sufficiently explored. If people would study certain promising theological propositions or themes, which have scarcely been investigated previously,

concerning the relations between the trinitarian mystery and the mystery of the duality of male and female, they would arrive at the question of the analogy between the Spirit and the feminine and so also at the question of the relation between women and the Holy Spirit. Therefore the feminine path is 'charismatic'. A vast field lies open here for women which is also for the well-being of the church, in relation with the apostolic priesthood and in a Marian line.

Would the recognition of women in the church reveal itself in the future through a kind of deaconal function for women? This question is being asked by some, and not without good argumentation.

Some philosophical considerations on the fulfilment of women in the Church, by Toinet:

Several disciplines are concerned with the study of the position of women.

The **life- and social sciences**, from biology to law, from sociology to psychology, each have working concepts of the human being and of the sexual differences between men and women, but never arrive at an unambiguous opinion on such issues.

Philosophy recognises the differences and variations among people but tries to arrange these according to the principle of unity. Nowadays philosophers usually consider mankind to be an original being, consistent in themselves, inserted into the world, but superior to material things by virtue of their spirit (intellect and will), a 'subject' or 'person' or 'freedom'. The philosopher tries to discover, amidst the multitude of experiences, the inner truth, the 'ontological' meaning of an original reality that expresses itself in a thoroughly personal sexual way.

The **theologian** is faced with a multitude of data from the life- and social sciences but confronts these with the teaching of the Bible. The theologian understands that only God as creator knows, and as revealer makes known, 'what finally lies within the human being.'

When investigating the ultimate meaning of the human being and their sexuality, a problem arises with regard to the concept of 'human nature' and the relationship between 'nature' and 'culture'.

According to some modern philosophical anthropologists it is impossible to determine what belongs to the 'nature' of a human being, man and woman, and what is determined by 'culture'. The human being, according to them, is not a 'definite reality', determined in their essence. For a great part man and woman are simply products of a particular culture that, especially in the Western world, is characterised by masculine domination. The real human being is constantly developing and therefore never definitive. He/she is the result of a 'dialectic of nature and culture'. The many variable factors in any culture make it impossible to perceive the reality of a universal humanity, and within this nature the different ways of personification of man and woman. The cultural aspect, thus interpreted, is that which is added to nature by intelligence and freedom. Therefore it is absolutely impossible to isolate human nature, masculine or feminine, which is not influenced by historical situations.

This view of human nature is obsolete. Toinet completely rejected the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre's ontology of women. They and others had begun with an erroneous view of the real metaphysical content of the concept 'nature', and they confused two interpretations of the meaning of nature which can be clearly distinguished even though they are related. This confusion led to a falsification.

In the context of a philosophical or theological anthropology, nature includes, by definition, all that is human and therefore all that emanates from the spirit and its activities. Thus it also embraces the cultural order and the variable expressions of culture.

Human nature exists in every person as an 'ontological' reality, a certain active and inventive principle, rooted in a radical acceptance of the divine act of creation. The specific masculine and feminine natures, within this human nature, can easily be distinguished and which find their foundation in the measure and meaning in God's creation plan. Herein also lies the basis of a natural order of interpersonal relationships which are fundamentally those of love. That is the case not only within the family, but also in the realm of human society. This ordering of love is, especially in the industrialised world, threatened by the domination of the masculine principle (initiative and outward creativity) over the feminine principle (active receptivity and inner fruitfulness). If man thinks that he, by his work, his techniques and political ideas, can exploit the earth, he considers himself less and less dependent on divine initiative. He then tends to consider himself as 'creating himself' by dominating nature which means a refusal of the situation of 'receptivity' and thus a latent denial of the feminine principle.

If women think that they have to participate in the masculine myth of Prometheus (that he can create himself by knowledge, work and unconditional freedom) they are unconsciously choosing against their own feelings and against the truth of their masculine partner at the same time. The task of women includes opposition to the stance of general masculine superiority. They should, however, also help men to accept themselves as created, to keep their power in perspective and to adopt a receptive attitude.

Cultural anthropology in relation to women, by Luis Artigas, co-worker of Biffi.¹³

The difference of masculine and feminine functions forms a fundamental element in social and cultural life.

Some believe that those differences in behaviour are 'natural', whereas others think that history shows that these differences are variable. Elements which have shaped the image of women in the Western world are:

1. Christianity, which brought the principle of freedom, dignity and the autonomy of the human person as God's child;
2. The feminine ideal of the Middle Ages and later Romanticism which, on renouncing pleasure, sought love on a higher level;
3. Modern sciences. The life sciences have above all contributed to the interpretation of sexuality, whereas social science has investigated its laws and conditions.

The present-day cultural model of women is, seen from the sociological point of view, oriented towards equal rights in society and in the church. Psychological studies indicate how the human beings, and therefore also women, can be helped to integrate their feelings and instincts (in a conscious and regular way) into the framework of a changing vision of person and society.

A first requirement for a study on woman in present-day society and in the church, is never to consider cultural anthropology separately from comprehensive research on a christian vision of the human being. The christian meaning of the human being should be the starting point for the study of women; it is therefore theological anthropology that matters most.

Cultural anthropology is only one of many ways which leads to 'humanitas'.

Cultural anthropology is important but it is not the only source from which insight into the nature of the human person comes. The search for a "meaning" in human existence necessitates philosophical reflection.

¹³ It seems that Biffi had prepared a text for this meeting but, according to him, 'This document did not correspond to what had been desired,' (by whom – the president? Le Guillou? Toinet?) From Rie Vendrik's letter to Pilar Bellosillo, 19 March 1975.

In cultural anthropology one can distinguish two principles:

1. All cultures are subject to change;
2. The human being as a cultural one can change, but is constant in so far as it is the creating unit of culture.

Cultural anthropology is actually important for the church's reflection on women which finds its basis in The Holy Scripture. Well then, The Holy Scripture is incarnated in the history of its origin. If therefore one wishes to arrive at conclusions about the meaning of women in God' plan, in the Church and in Society, biblical elements must be clarified. The question hereby is whether the revelation on women contains something genuinely fundamental or whether, on the contrary, it gives only simple pointers which are not absolutely definitive either for theoretical research or for practice.

Artegas went on to warn against taking definite standpoints which would hinder discussion. According to him we must, above all, recognise the advancement of women as a 'sign of the time' (as Vaticanum II and other documents of church teaching had done).

However, it must not be forgotten that this is only the beginning of a process from which spectacular results probably cannot be expected, especially if one takes into account that the moral insight and practical experience of women are of vital importance to it. Moreover, their lack of specialised theological education puts women at a disadvantage against the Church theologians, often making conditions for a dialogue unequal.

It is also important to distinguish between cultural anthropology and Christian anthropology when investigating the position of women.

In other words, it is necessary to distinguish between what is valuable and what is dangerous.

Valuable elements are:

1. The call for full recognition of the dignity and the rights of women as human beings in the church;
2. The demand for non-paternalistic relationships within the church. This has nothing to do with the hierarchical structure of the church;
3. The issue of a far greater integration of women into the specific activities of the church. This does not include the priestly functions in the strict sense of the word (because this subject is outside the present discussion);
4. The demand that the position and role of woman in society not be limited to the traditional image of the mother who stays within the home.

These points require scientific research on women, their ontology and their specific nature; an exploration which has not previously been sufficiently developed and which must take place in the light of christian revelation.

There remain, however, perils:

1. The danger of judging the past as absolutely negative. When one criticises the past in an aggressive way, demands may arise which perhaps have only a short lifespan (as we see in certain areas of church renewal which arise from counter-reactions);
2. The danger of a total levelling, which psychologists and sociologists (certainly not only men) warn against. Such a levelling would be detrimental to women as well as men.

Artegas' conclusions:

A critical outlook on the Christian tradition regarding women in the different periods of church history is needed.

Also required is a global outlook on the human being which fits in with Christian revelation. This view must not be a closed system or an imposed scheme but simply a courageous

witness to something that we did not create ourselves but have received from God through His Son.

A revision of the teaching on Mary, from the point of view of her significance for humanity in general and for women in particular, should certainly be undertaken.

The president of the commission proposed to discuss the scientific texts summarised above in the following plenary meeting. He added: "The documents may be beyond the actual competence of several members of the commission, but the very fact of receiving them and being able to react, both to the language and the content, signifies in itself an important form of dialogue between some theologians (in the strict sense) and other members of God's People".

These texts will:

1. be sent for study to all members, in French and in English;
2. be included, as highly specialised documents, in the Final Document, even if they haven't received explicit approval of the commission members;
3. be placed in a certain position in the Final Document and this will be chosen during the last meeting.

At the end of the meeting the dates of 15-20 April 1975 were agreed for the fifth session and also that December 1975 or January 1976 would be the time for the sixth and last meeting.

V.4.1.2 Commentary

- ? One notices with some amazement the response to the letter to the Pope.
 - ? Why did it take such a long time for an answer to come? Did Rome think that the delay would move the 'group of five' to decide to return to the conference table in December?
 - ? The letter that the president said had been sent by the Secretariat of State to Claire Delva never arrived.
 - ? The text written in pencil on a little card was the only answer that the five received. They never had a serious response to their letter or to their requests. This raises the suspicion that the answer did not come from the Pope himself, but that it was drawn up by the nuncio and Mgr. Bartoletti over the telephone. Peter Hebblethwaite, however, mentions that Mgr. Benelli of the Secretariat of State wrote a letter to the nuncio in Brussels, on 2 December 1974, asking him to inform Mrs. Claire Delva that "The Holy Father, after a careful study of their letter, expressed the hope that the five members would rethink their decision and continue to take part in the work of the commission".¹⁴ It escapes us completely how this information can be reconciled with the fact that on 26 November the nuncio in Brussels had already received the answer from Rome.
- ? The introduction of the twin-objectives showed that the proper work of the commission had reached an impasse. Shifting attention to the International Year of Women¹⁵ disguised the fact that there was no interest in a more profound research on important questions among the majority of the commission members. That had already become clear in the

¹⁴ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 641.

¹⁵ In a letter to the other four Pillars written on 20 March 1974, "...the question of the International Year of Women does not justify in itself a prolongation of the life of the commission....I ask myself again what we can do. It seems that now their main preoccupation and their strategy is oriented towards the preparation of the delegation of the I.O.C. (International Organisations of Catholics) that will go to Mexico, so much that everyone complies with the opinion of the Holy See'.

third session. Marina Lessa wrote to the other members, “ ... à propos, did you already receive the report? Radically reduced, isn't it? One sees how little was done in this session.... the core of our commission is gradually evaporating’.¹⁶

? The president had transferred the theological-exegetical work of the commission to other bodies. The study commission would henceforth occupy itself only with concrete proposals. However these concrete proposals still rested on a Christian view of the human being and of the relationship between men and women. Theology cannot be separated from life. It was therefore surprising that the ‘group of five’ did not react, as Sister Teresa did, to this giving up of the most important part of the commission’s work . However, it became clear from a later letter from Rie Vendrik that the five had to some extent become discouraged: “I consider it extremely serious that we had to part with the essential content, the very basis of our work, which, as an isolated matter, has been handed over to the International Theological Commission. When I realised this I wanted to protest, but I felt so helpless against those unknown powers.”¹⁷

? The competent bodies to which Mgr. Bartoletti had passed on the study, namely the International Theological Commission and the Pontifical Biblical Commission, did research the issue of women and priesthood. The Biblical Commissions’ conclusions are known:

Seventeen members of the commission, who were present during the entire meeting, voted on the different aspects of the report on women and priesthood. They accepted unanimously that the New Testament in itself does not seem to be able to decide explicitly and for all times whether a woman can be ordained as a priest. They voted 12 to 5 that biblical grounds alone are not sufficient to exclude the possibility of the ordination of women.¹⁸

The conclusions of the International Theological Commission, on the other hand, remain a secret.

? After reading out the declaration by the ‘group of five’, Pilar Bellosillo received no comments from the other commission members. Only the president responded and gave them a scolding.. This was typical for the atmosphere and the relations within the commission. Afterwards everyone pretended that the letter to the Pope was only a painful incident which was now closed.

? The texts of the experts were indeed very specialised and of the same tendency as earlier theological, exegetical and anthropological documents which had come before the commission. They certainly would be “beyond the actual competence of several commission members”. What use did these texts have, other than to impress the non-theological members? When studying these three documents one notices the elaborate, complicated, problematising and mystifying language which is used. What should one understand, for example, by the following text?

“...The better one actually succeeds in clarifying the articulation of trinitarian theology, christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and the analysis of this whole and of the cultural successions throughout history – and all that linked to the unity of the Covenant, in the integral symbolism of dogma – the better will also emerge the profound theological significance of the indissoluble and pure relationship between two principles, without which there would not be a church at all: the feminine Marian-

¹⁶ Letter of 23 February 1974.

¹⁷ Letter of 19 February.

¹⁸ In : *Origins*, Vol VI, Nr.6,1, July 1976, 92-96. Also in : L. and A. Swidler (red.), *Women Priests*, New York 1977, 338-346.

ecclesial principle and the masculine-sacerdotal (ministerial-apostolic)- ecclesial principle.”¹⁹

- ? Is it not strange that the approval of a report of the previous meeting needed a vote? Corrections and additions could easily have been inserted in the actual report. Also curious is that only fifteen members voted on this. Where were the other ten?

V.4.1.3. The ‘Group of Five’

Pilar, Claire, Marina and Rie returned home disappointed. It is clear from their correspondence that they felt that their complaints had not been taken seriously. Rie wrote:

“... I agree with you, Claire, that they did not take the objections which we explained in the letter to the Pope seriously. Nothing which we requested has been permitted. They did not even give us the chance to clarify our objections; they simply brushed them aside”.²⁰

The five still hesitated about whether they should go to the April meeting. Claire’s opinion, though, was that they should definitely remain in the commission in order to continue providing some counterbalance, adding, ‘What we say is in any case heard’. She suggested conferring together about a new strategy on 5 March.

Rie proposed, in the above-mentioned letter, that they should draw up a kind of declaration which they could publish after the end of their mandate. It should be an open, honest declaration in which the essential points of the work of the five as well as several perspectives for the future, would be expressed.

Another possibility would be to write their own draft of the Final Document. They could present this to Mgr. Bartoletti, asking him to allow it to be discussed in the next meeting.

On 3 March 1975, Rie had one of her regular consultations with René van Eyden. He had in the meantime formulated a proposal for a text that could be included in the Final Document of the commission. The ‘group of five’ could develop this proposal further and then present it at the meeting in April. The object of this text was to offer a hopeful and encouraging perspective from an independent, realistic viewpoint. It could point out the profound changes that were leading to a more equal position of women in society and in the church. It would not be based on the traditional dogmatic images of women but rather on the new female self knowableness of women.

The text consisted of four points:

1. A survey of hopeful developments;
2. The still existing discrimination against women;
3. The task of liberating women from a christian viewpoint;
4. A call for the solidarity of all women.

The five met on 5 March and during this meeting they decided that, at the general meeting in April, Rie would present a proposal for the possibility of a minority report. They felt that the formulation of a Minority Note was the most realistic approach in the situation as it stood. Thus they (temporarily) abandoned Rie’s proposal of a communal declaration after the end of their mandate. René van Eyden’s draft, which had diametrically opposed the documents of the

¹⁹ From the document by Guillou: ‘Plus on réussira en effet à mettre en évidence l’articulation de la théologie trinitaire, de la christologie, de l’écclésiologie, de l’anthropologie et de l’analyse des ensembles et des successions culturelles au sein de l’histoire – et tout cela est articulable dans l’unité de l’Alliance, dans la symbolique intégrale du dogme – plus aussi se dégagera la signification théologique profonde de la relation indissoluble, mais aussi inconfusable, entre deux principes sans lesquels il n’y aurait pas d’Eglise: le principe féminin-mariale-ecclésial et le principe masculin-sacerdotal (ministériel-apostolique)-ecclésial.’

²⁰ Letter of 19 February 1975.

Roman theologians, was also abandoned; they recognised that it was simply not feasible at that stage of the commission's work.

V.4.2. The Fifth Plenary Session

1. The meeting of 15-19 April 1975;
2. Commentary;
3. The 'Group of Five';
4. The Minority Note.

V.4.2.1. The Meeting of 15 - 19 April 1975

From the report of this meeting one must conclude that it was a very confusing session. Only fragments of the discussion were recorded.

De la Potterie gave, upon request, an explanation of the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Claire Delva asked him why there were no women members in this commission. According to De la Potterie, there were not yet enough woman exegetes with a Ph.D.

A short discussion took place on the three scientific texts which had been presented during the previous general meeting. Rie Vendrik believed that the texts of Le Guillou and Toinet presented serious difficulties for understanding, let alone interpretation by 'lay people'. She also thought that these documents gave an image of women which did not accord with modern reality. Artigas' text expressed only the possibilities and limits of cultural anthropology, whereas the answer to the question posed called for biblical and theological studies.

At the president's request, Rosemary Goldie had drawn up a proposal for the Final Document:

- I. DOCUMENTS OF THE WHOLE COMMISSION;
 - A. **The Human Being, Man and Woman, in God's Plan**
 1. A Sociological Introduction;
 2. Equal and Different ("l'autre semblable"²¹), the Social Sciences;
 3. A Contribution from Biblical Theology.
 - B. **The Participation of Women in the Pastoral Responsibilities of the Church**
 1. Survey and Sources;
 2. Religious in the Church;
 3. A Contribution from the Discussion on the Ministères.
- II PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
 - A. Particular proposals concerning the participation of women in the mission of the Church and their position in church activities and organisations;
 - B. Recommendations presented to the Bishop's Synod of 1974.
- III UNSOLVED PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS POSED
- IV DOCUMENTS OF THE COMMISSION'S EXPERTS

²¹ This formulation is borrowed from the well known book of Francine Dumas, *L'autre semblable*, Paris - Neuchatel, 1967.

Theological and philosophical contributions from Leguillou, Toinet and Artigas. Hamel's text 'Christ and Woman' was not included in the Final Document because, as Hamel himself said, his contribution was almost completely included in De la Potterie's text.

The discussion that followed on this proposal was recorded in the meeting's report in only one sentence: "An extensive discussion concerning the Final Document followed". (*Un ample discussion s'engage au sujet du contenu du document ou dossier final.*)

Rie Vendrik then asked whether, should they not reach a real consensus on the Final Document, it would be possible to add a minority document so that the Pope would get a correct impression of the different opinions in the commission. Hamel agreed with this proposal on condition that those who couldn't agree with the final text of the majority also wrote down their reasons for disagreement.

The president thought, however, that there would not be enough time to formulate such a minority note. He also believed that it would not be necessary because, after all, there would be room in the Final Document for issues which didn't receive the approval of all members. Rosemary Goldie said she would also regret the inclusion of a minority report in the Final Document.

The proposal for the Final Document was then unanimously accepted and a group of four people – Mrs.P.Colini-Lombardi, Sister Teresa, De la Potterie and Hamel – all residents of Rome, were to formulate the unsolved problems and send them to the other members before November for commentary and additions.

The president asked Biffi and Carriquiri to draw up, possibly together with other experts, a sociological synthesis.

V.4.2.2. Commentary

- ? It is unfortunate that Hamel withdrew his text 'Christ and Woman' from the Final Document. He had expressed valuable insights in this article into the causes of church opposition to the ordination of women. He had further pointed out in his text that women theologians could give original and enriching contributions to theology.²² Why did he withdraw, was there pressure exerted on him?
- ? Rie Vendrik's proposal to add a minority report to the Final Document was rejected. Such a practice is, however, normal and usual in the presentation of different points of view. It was not unheard of in Rome either, as one was included in the report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.
- ? In the meantime Rome continued to speak about women in the old-fashioned way, as if there were no study commission concerned with women in modern society and in the church. Sometimes it even seemed as if Pope Paul VI wanted to provoke the study commission in his addresses. At the Angelus on 17 August 1975 he spoke about the dignity and mission of woman, as God had in mind for her in His plan, "as a dear daughter, as pure and strong virgin, as loving bride, above all as mother, whose dignity we have to cherish seriously, and finally as widow, pious, sorely tried in suffering, and indefatigable".²³

²² See plenary meeting of 15-18 November 1973.

²³ From *Osservatore Romano* (German edition) 20 August 1975.

V.4.2.3. The 'Group of Five'.

A lively consultation took place amongst the 'group of five' during the more than eight months between the meeting of April 1975 and the plenary session of January 1976. In frequent correspondence they exchanged ideas about the strategy they should follow.

It was especially Rie who took the lead with a proposal for an alternative text that could be added to the Final Document. One of the group, however, was fearful of the reaction that such a text might evoke in other commission members. Rie pointed out that they could not be silent but had to stand up for their opinion:

“... because we have an obligation to the church and especially to women in the whole world. We have a genuinely prophetic task.... I would so wish for the well-being of the whole church that we might have the courage to say about what, and also why we cannot agree. In this way we would help the church more than if we keep silent.”²⁴

When they received the draft of the Final Document which was to be presented for the vote in the next general meeting, The 'five' became convinced that they should write down their own ideas. Pilar and Rie conferred with Claire, in Lasne (Belgium) on 25-26 June, about the strategy they should follow. They decided to ask Prof. Thils' advice. Rie wrote to him, explaining her thoughts; on 15 July Claire and Rie visited him in Louvain. He supported them in their intention to write a text for the last commission meeting. He gave them his article *Les Théologiens sont interpellés*, which also gave inspiration and encouragement to the five. In August they met again in Lasne, (only Marina from Brasil was absent) and they decided to draw up a text. After they had determined the broad outline of the draft, each one of the 'five' took it upon herself to work out a part of the text and send it to the others for comments, corrections and additions. The results of this process would then be sent to Claire.

From 25 to 30 August 1975 Pilar, Vitoria, Claire, Marina and Rie took part in the Colloquium 'Women and Men as Partners in Christian Communities' in Louvain (Belgium). They were the only members of the study commission to do so. In the General Statement at the end of this conference was, amongst other comments, reported: "Those who hold power in the Churches show a tendency to neutralise conflicts and to ignore them, especially if they concern women. One way of neutralizing such a conflict is the establishment of special commissions, which usually delay any solution of a problem".²⁵

This colloquium reinforced the 'group of five's conviction that they were on the right track. They were further encouraged by a sensational event in ecumenical relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, wrote a letter to the Pope on 7 July 1975 in which he informed him that there existed no fundamental objection to the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church.²⁶

The five met again in Lasne, in order to draw up the first draft of a minority note. Thanks to their correspondence, the note gradually took shape in the following months. The five were still hoping that some other members of the study commission, such as Sister Teresa, Mrs. Bahintchie and Debbie Seymour, would support this note.

In November Rie proposed, as a matter of loyalty, to inform the president about their plans to bring in a Minority Note at the last meeting. In consultation with the others, she requested an interview for Pilar and herself with Mgr. Bartoletti.

He replied that he could receive them on 8 December.

²⁴ Letter of Rie to Pilar, 17 June 1975.

²⁵ *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 59, March 1976 'Women and Men as Partners in Christian Communities.', 11.

²⁶ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *In the Vatican*, xxiii.

Pilar and Rie were somewhat nervous about this interview, so they decided to prepare by acting it out with Claire. Claire wrote about this experience in a letter to the other two:

“....We three have rehearsed the interview. That caused much laughter. Rie was herself, Pilar also, and it was she who made notes for a report for our group, whereas I was the president, who, wringing his hands, began: “mi sembra....” [It seems to me....] An example of our acting dialogue: Rie said: “We want to inform you, your Excellency, that we have decided to send our Minority Note to the members of the study commission”. The president (Claire), jumping up from his chair: “Oh no, you won’t do that!” Pilar, seeing the president jumping up, burst out laughing, and Rie, at the first sentence of the hands-wringing president, said: “I feel nervous already”. But seriously, this has helped us to know at least a bit about how the conversation can go, even if we don’t know how it will really turn out.”²⁷

The tone of the interview with Mgr. Bartoletti in Rome was in fact pleasant. Rie did the talking and Pilar took notes. The president reacted negatively at Rie’s proposal to add a Minority Note to the Final Document. He suggested, on the contrary, that the note be sent to him. He would present it to the Pope, together with his personal report about the commission. He added that he would accept the Minority Note only if it did not have a polemic tone. They then agreed that Mgr. Bartoletti would receive the note at the beginning of January, so that he would still have time to send them a reply before the general meeting.

After this interview, Rie once again reworked the text of the note and sent this version to the other four with a request to react before Christmas.

On 6 January 1976 she sent the Minority Note to Mgr. Bartoletti. In an accompanying letter she proposed again to include the note in the Final Document. She also reminded him that he had offered the possibility of personally handing over the note to the Pope.

They received an answer from Mgr. Bartoletti promptly, on 17 January. He wrote that the entire study commission would have to decide whether a Minority Note could be included in the Final Document. He did not write a word about his promise to present the note personally to the Pope. He did suggest, though, that most of the points of the Minority Note were either already mentioned in the section on Unsolved Problems and Questions or that these could still be taken up under that heading in the Final Document. He gave permission to distribute the note amongst the members.

As the last commission meeting approached, The ‘five’ realised that a tough confrontation lay ahead of them. The last contest. They encouraged each other, as is evident from their correspondence. Claire wrote on 26 September:

“....We have to be aware that it will be difficult, because they will try everything to oppose us, either by intimidation (we are accustomed to that), or, as we know, by manipulation and diplomacy (confusion),. That can be difficult for us. If we have to enter into discussion about adding or deleting, it will be very difficult.”

Marina wrote on 11 November:

“Imagine, if we are mistaken and nobody supports us.... Should we not prepare ourselves beforehand for a rejection? What will we do then? Fight all alone against the wall of the ‘Cita del Vaticano’?”

²⁷ Letter of 19 November 1975.

On 13 January 1976 Rie wrote to Claire:

“The nearer the date of the meeting approaches, the more uncomfortable I feel....”

Claire wrote back on 19 January:

“...to perform our task faithfully till the end, we have to remain very polite and even extremely friendly, but also firm!”

The day before the general meeting, four of the ‘five’ met in Rome (Pilar was ill) and decided that Rie would distribute the Minority Note among the members of the study commission. How things would then develop, only the meeting would show.

V.4.2.4. the Minority Note²⁸

1. The meaning and the bearing of this note

The final dossier of the Commission containing the results of the work carried out in the course of the various sessions comprises documents whose origin, value and authority are very diverse. Some are truly the fruit of the work of all the Commission; others, however, did not receive unanimous backing, far from it. Other documents were brought forward by members, but they were never studied or discussed, or put to the vote. As a result they do not represent the work of the entire Commission.

In reality, some of the members recognized very little of themselves in this final dossier. Hence the idea, indeed the need, they felt to present, in addition to the so-called Commission documents, a minority note, conceived as a positive contribution to the work of the Commission.

This minority note was drawn up first of all out of concern for honesty vis-à-vis the Holy Father. The Pope entrusted *all* the members with a very specific responsibility, and *all* are answerable to the men and women of our time for presenting a complete, objective and true picture of the work carried out. This work, was certainly not easy and it is normal that the opinions given did diverge on a number of occasions,. It is essential, therefore, that *all* the members, and not only the majority, should be able to recognize their ideas, their points of view and their experiences in the major documents of the dossier. This was not the case. This lacuna was all the more serious since the signatories of the note were convinced, in all loyalty, that they were honestly expressing the thinking of thousands of people, religious and lay, in different positions and from different cultures and whose fidelity to the Church could not be called into question.

The integration of the minority note into the final dossier would contribute greater richness. Thus the dossier would demonstrate the various views put forward and the variety of arguments examined without attenuating them artificially. If the final dossier, in its present state, comes to the knowledge of others, it will create an understandable disappointment which could affect the Church’s credibility. This dossier will become part of history; sooner or later it will become known and it will be used. It is essential that those who look to it for doctrinal or pastoral guidelines:

a) should find elements of a healthy pluralism, which is quite normal if we take into account the delicate nature and the breadth of the question dealt with, as well as the present stage of research within the Church. b) should also see that Christians today have perceived all the

²⁸ This text is borrowed from *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 108, 1987/1, 16-21.

present requirements of faith in a period of change and have attempted to reach a deeper understanding of the human condition.

2. *Aims and significance of the Commission*

The Commission was set up in response to a desire expressed by the bishops on the occasion of the Bishops' Synod of 1971 and which requested that 'women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of Society and likewise of the Church'. The idea of a Commission with the task of studying the situation of women in Society and the Church was put forward under the heading of 'justice in the world'. It is therefore in the name of justice that this commission was established.

In the course of the first audience which he granted to the Commission, the Holy Father indicated the path to be followed in these words: 'Need we recall the *principal* (our italics) aim of this body? It is to collect, verify, interpret, revise and develop the ideas expressed concerning the role of women in modern society... This already expresses all the work of observation, research and reflection with which you are entrusted along with the aid of theologians and experts.' (Osservatore Romano, 18 November 1973).

The Holy Father thus spoke of 'research', of 'verifying'. Yet the sessions of the Commission as a whole were not a sort of laboratory for research and verification but generally a centre for the teaching of a theological position. The theological-exegetical documents came to the same sort of conclusions, without it being possible to see how the latter were in any real continuity with the sources which they were supposed to come from. Moreover, the discussion was not well balanced, all the 'theologians' present being of the same mind; a real confrontation – with research and verification – could therefore not take place as it should have. Yet other, much more accessible theological contributions could have been cited.

In short, the work of the Commission was conditioned by the composition of the group and by the working methods adopted, notably the unilateral nature of the texts submitted to the members, the progress of the discussions and the exchanges, the lack of procedure at important moments, the lack of dialogue and research with others.

3. *Basic questions*

The signatories to this note have great reticence about the doctrine which emerges from these documents as a whole and wish to express certain basic disagreements. The principal reason for this is that the most central questions were not dealt with in-depth. Here are some illustrations:

a) The differences between men and women

The differences between men and women were strongly emphasized in the documents in the dossier. Much was said about the following terms and expressions to be found in several of the dossier documents: the specificity of women, the complementarity of women, the vocation of women... These expressions are equivocal; they can just as easily lead to the maintenance of the present discriminatory *status quo* as to liberation from it.

Such emphasis, it would seem, is due to the fear of denying or rejecting the differences between men and women. No such danger exists. Women do not want to be men (to be male, *vir*). On the contrary, they want to be women to the full; human beings with the same value as men. For centuries the teachings of philosophers and theologians often, erroneously, emphasized the differences between men and women and, for the latter, have been the source

of multiple forms of discrimination. These days we feel the need to emphasise the factors which are expressions of equality, co-responsibility. Moreover, it is not a question, first of all and above all, of 'differences' between men and women, but principally of the man-woman 'relationship'. As long as the problem of discrimination against women is not dealt with and looked at in this way, it will remain without an adequate solution. The documents scarcely promote any progress to the crux of the matters under discussion.

b) God's plan and the signs of the times₂

In the course of the Commission meetings and in the documents, the role of women 'in God's plan' was discussed repeatedly: it is in this plan that women find the meaning and the orientation of their lives. It is possible to agree about this proposition and yet remain completely ambiguous. Is God's plan something which is static, from which we can deduce an outline which is fixed for all eternity? This is certainly not the doctrine of *Gaudium et Spes* which states: "It is one of the properties of the human being that he can only achieve true and full humanity by means of culture, that is through the *cultivation* (our italics) of the goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together"(no. 53). It is therefore, over the years, a question of searching, discovering, inventing. With regard to the condition of women and men we can repeat what *Gaudium et Spes* has to say about peace: "Peace will never be achieved once and for all, but must be built up continually." (nr. 78)

As for the 'signs of the times', *Gaudium et Spes* tells us that "at all times the Church bears the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel...In language intelligible to every generation she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions human beings ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come..."(no. 4). Paul VI himself recalls this in his letter to Cardinal Roy.²⁹

c) The socio-cultural context

Here again the documents in the dossier are particularly deficient. Specialists in anthropology (and therefore in questions which concern the Commission) are unanimous in acknowledging that their theories are to some extent dependent upon the cultural concepts and the social institutions of each era. This socio-cultural context inevitably exists; in itself it is neither good nor bad, but it introduces into ideas and institutions an element which is secondary, perfectible, and therefore susceptible to change. Among the actual expressions of this context we studied in particular the social 'roles' (patterns of behaviour accepted by people of the similar status) and the cultural 'stereotypes' (judgements commonly accepted).

Even philosophical systems are marked by this context. In order to carry out their work seriously, it was essential that the members of the Commission should learn how theological concepts and ecclesiastical decisions were marked by the socio-cultural context (roles and stereotypes) of the past. No systematic study was undertaken on this issue. Indeed, one or other document still recognizes, without providing justification, a certain 'symbolism' which is regularly called into question today.

d) The 'document' on ministères

²⁹ Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* of 14 May 1971 from Paul VI to Cardinal Roy.

The problem arises in the living communities of the Church throughout the world how the laity, and thus also women, can share in the ministry of the Church. This is also a burning question in ecclesiastical life today. We, however, find it regrettable that a document on this issue is to be found in the final dossier. The reasons for this are as following:

- The question of ministries for lay people was not examined seriously in the Commission. Some information was given on the subject during the first meeting; a discussion then took place but the members had not been able to prepare for it with the necessary care. During the second meeting, the discussion was closed, despite the fact that no conclusions had been reached and that there had been no analysis of the research contributed by various countries. Thus the document on this subject (to be found in the final dossier) cannot be considered a faithful echo of the work of the Commission.

- In the course of the first meeting, the question of ministries 'for women' was raised. *All* the women members of the Commission refused to accept such a proposal. In the document in the final dossier an effort was made to correct the indicted expression by saying: 'In lay ministries, strictly speaking, no distinction can be made between those who are masculine and those who are feminine. There are, however, certain ministries which are more suited to the one or the other condition of life, depending on the vocation which is specific and proper to each individual and depending on the socio-cultural context in which the Christian community is called to live and to witness.' This statement was neither discussed nor approved by the Commission; and moreover, it raises questions. If it was unequivocally a question of lay ministries than this question did not belong to the Commission for the Study of Women but to the Council for the Laity or to any Commission dealing with the role of the Laity in the Church.

- The points listed in the 'Résumé' are not the outcome of a study carried out by the Commission. The question as to whether ministries for lay people are desirable or not remained unsolved: the Commission was rather of the opinion that the time was not ripe for such a question, that more experience was needed and that a study would require much more time.

- The Commission made no study of the question of the diaconate.

- In short, the document on ministries to be found in the dossier, in no way represents ideas which were studied or approved by the Commission.

In closing, the signatories wish to state how much they, throughout all the work of the Commission, were anxious to contribute to the awakening within the Church of a healthy, critical conscience essential for the stimulation of the renewal to which the Church is constantly called in order to live the Gospel and to witness to it. They consider that the conditions under which the work had to be carried out did not make it possible to get down to basic problems and which alone would lead to some clarity in the concepts which the Church puts forward concerning women.

For them, in reality, the problem of women must be situated in a wider context: there is a need to establish a new scale of values, to draft out a new type of relationship between men and women which should gradually replace the present model based on concepts of superiority and inferiority, and which is linked to debatable roles and stereotypes, all of which is fixed for centuries or even millennia. It must be demonstrated that the struggle for the Christian

liberation of women is part of the struggle against all injustice and against all oppression bearing down on humanity.

It amounts even to conceiving a new Society and a new Church in which men and women will be in real and authentic cooperation for the advancement and the salvation of the world.

29 December 1975

Maria del Pilar Bellosillo
Claire Delva
Marina Lessa
Maria Vitoria Pinheiro
Maria (Rie) Vendrik

V.4.3. The Sixth Plenary Session

1. The meeting of 26-31 January 1976
2. Commentary
3. The 'Group of Five
4. Çommentary

V.4.3.1. The Meeting of 26 - 31 January 1976

Three days of the study commission's last meeting were devoted to the draft of the Final Document. The remaining time was spent on the meetings, in another groups' composition, on the International Year of Women.

At the beginning of the meeting the report of the previous session was approved, albeit with some corrections.

Then Rie Vendrik distributed to all members the **Minority Note** by the 'group of five'. (It should be noted here that this is not mentioned in the report of the sixth session³⁰) A short **History of the Study Commission**, written by Mrs. Graber-Duvernay, was also handed out to all members.

Biffi then presented a sociological text that he had drawn up together with Carriquiri. This very elaborate description of the position of women is briefly summarised as follows: ³¹

Women in a Society of Global Dimension: 1975

The introduction stated that 'the Church has indeed exalted the dignity of women, announcing the fundamental equality of all human beings, welcoming and supporting various specific vocations, promoting institutions characterized by a lively and often incisive participation of women. Over the centuries, however, it has been conditioned by history and culture, and today it should more freely admit women to responsible participation in pastoral structures that are, for the most part, composed of men.'

Women in marriage and in the family

The industrialization and urbanization in the Western World brought about a great evolution in which important changes in values and norms took place. In the industrialized countries the family structure shifted from the large patriarchal to the nuclear family.

Although women in our time consider motherhood still a great privilege, they see it no longer as their only and exclusive task. The cult of motherhood should no longer be a comfortabl

³⁰ Rie wrote at the top of the report she received: 'Incredible! How these minutes have been laundered!'

³¹ Marc Luyckx wrote a summary of this text by Mgr. Biffi in *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 83, October 1980, 4-5. This summary is, with some changes and adaptations, used here.

masculine myth that perpetuates women's marginalization, relegates her to merely domestic tasks, and economizes for society the cost of institutions that would save women from the immense suffering of being unable to give bread, clothes and health to their children. This would also relieve them from burdens arising from the fact that the education of the children is left almost entirely to the mother.

- Women demand that the role in the family should be revised. The father is not only the breadwinner, but he should, just like the mother, be concerned about the everyday life in the family, and jointly responsible for the education of the children.

- Society should eliminate the social discrimination of women on several levels, and take care for provisions that alleviate the task of women, e.g. the introduction of day-nurseries and day-care centres, maternity leave, etc.

Women in socio-economic life

Women suffer from the injustice of a double task: in society they usually occupy lower positions than men, whereas in family-life they take upon them the greater part of the task, and are in-service of the men. The analysis made so far (reflecting factual situations and outlining tendencies unfortunately in operation) enables us to formulate a sociological law: every time an activity begins to be admired and to give status, women are gradually excluded, whereas, when women are admitted to a given form of employment, the latter rapidly loses prestige.

Women were so strictly chained to their maternal domestic role, that even when it has been seen as natural that women should work 'outside' they devoted themselves to activities that were closer to this role; i.e. they took up activities which harmonised better with their domestic role. There has been an adaptation – in the first place of women themselves – to the prolongation and extension of certain functions and 'talents', without, however, taking into account the dignity of woman as a human being.

Women and culture

Up till now, women have not fully attained the level worthy of human beings. It is because they have had no way of expressing their full personal dimension in society and in the world, but also because the culture surrounding them bears overwhelming signs of masculine domination. Today, however, women are becoming more and more aware of their own dignity as a person (*Pacem in terris*). At the same time they cause, by their desire for promotion and liberation, crisis in the innumerable cultural patterns emerging in our society, as well as in interpersonal relationships as in the field of groups, associations, classes, institutions, peoples and nations.

Women demand full access to culture, to become conscious and responsible moulders of it, to imprint their own characteristic marks on human society and the world, and thus enrich culture with a dimension which has been lacking up till today.

Women and political life

Up till now women have played only an insignificant role in political life. That is the reason why they hold inferior positions. Therefore society is deprived of the specific and fundamental feminine contribution with all the negative consequences for society.. There exists a wide-spread – and sometimes very definitive – masculine opposition with regard to the participation of women in political life. This opposition seeks justification on the pretext that politics are a man's domain, into which women should be accepted only in an exceptional and marginal capacity. However, the common denominator of all the above mentioned factors – i.e. the participation of women in the political life of their country – is only one aspect of the total evolution of their social situation. It is above all the

economic role which women are going to play which will determine their social status. Can we still uphold the theory that the so-called essential characteristics of femininity such as practical talents, a preference for the conviviality of home and family, the characteristic link between 'openness' and 'intimacy' make women have a leaning towards a private life rather than to a public one? Is it not more true to say that a career taken up by a woman tends to make her more outward-looking, whereas house holding and family matters lead her to look inwardly at herself? In general one can observe that the traditional female world seems to be inward-looking and limited in its outward-view. It is this confine within the narrow family circle and the absorption in this very small world (microcosm) which is, for a great part, the explanation for the lack of interest in politics shown by women. Politics has to deal with problems in general terms and with world-wide (macrocosm) considerations.. Speaking globally, it is generally true to say that the specialization of women in domestic, maternal and conjugal tasks has led to a sort of dependence on men. Women retain the mentality of 'minors' in political matters. Men are mediators between women and the political field.

We may therefore say that the political activity of women reflects the secondary role that custom assigns to them in society, the economy and culture, as well as an upbringing which leads them to accept all this as a matter of fact.

It is therefore very important to pay attention to the education and upbringing of women to make them conscious of the important role in the humanization of society. They can give a contribution to the work of peace, but also to a more just distribution of economic goods, respect for minorities, recognition and protection of human rights, and the will to solve in a peaceful way the inevitable conflicts, resulting from human deficiencies.

This contribution by Biffi was very favourably received. The commission members proposed that this text be placed as an introduction to the Final Document. There were only a few critical suggestions: The pluralism of cultural situations in regard to women should be emphasised more. A short text linking this sociological contribution to theology seemed necessary. There was a request that, on the basis of this text, further research should later be undertaken on:

- the situation of women in industry and agriculture;
- the education of men, women and children to include the equality and participation of women in politics;
- flexibility and change in women's roles;
- religious sociology and, related to that, the responsibility of the church in relation to the world.

Biffi promised to consider the various suggestions for the final version.

The president announced the following morning, 29 January: "A joyful message: The Holy Father has given permission for a woman to address him during the audience on 31 January ". The youngest commission member, Debbie Seymour, was designated to take this task upon herself.

Next, Mgr. Magnoni explained that the Congregation of the Sacraments, together with representatives from other church bodies (including two members of this study commission, Mrs. Colini-Lombardi and Rosemary Goldie), was preparing a project on the **Lay-ministères**. They would begin by asking information from the various Bishops' Conferences about the

reception of *Ministeriam quaedam* and the exercise of the tasks of lector and acolyte as well as other functions already filled by lay people.

In the proposal about the ministères it would be left to the Bishops' Conferences *if*, and in what way, they want to establish these ministères. When this research project would be completed, advice would be requested from the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith before presenting the plan to the Pope. It was understood that the data from the study commission on ministères, as well as information from other sources, would be used for this project.

During the discussion that followed, the same opinions were expressed as in the first plenary meeting. Mrs. Pyne was astonished that the task of lector and acolyte were still reserved for men only. Women had carried out these functions all over the world for a long time.

Sister Teresa pointed out once more the danger of clericalisation of lay people, and of a possibility of dividing up lay people into first and second classes.

Mrs. Bahintchie thought that the question of ministères was obsolete; in several countries they were already far beyond those issues.....

On the other hand, Mrs Graber-Duvernay thought that, even if it were obsolete, one should be positive and pleased about the project because the church recognised thereby the participation of lay people, and therefore also women, in the work of evangelisation.

Le Guillou emphasised the need to place the recognition of ministères, as church activities, within the theology of the Mystical Body. He also thought that the exclusion of women from the task of lector and acolyte needed revision.

Hamel wished to connect the problem of ministères to the theology of charismas.

The next point on the agenda was to record a number of unsolved problems and questions from previous meetings, which were to be included in the Final Document. After extensive discussion the following problems were listed:

1. What is femininity?

To what extent are masculinity and femininity dependent on culture? What is the kernel of femininity that remains constant throughout all changes? It seems difficult to give a clear picture of the absolute equality of man and woman, and to indicate what this implies for philosophical, theological and biblical restructuring.

The terms 'specific nature of women', 'complementarity', 'vocation of women', were ambiguous for a number of commission members. Even if these terms were intended to assist in the emancipation of women, they could also be used to enforce the 'status quo' of discrimination against them. The expression 'women in God's plan' likewise raised questions: Is God's plan a static reality from which a definitive life project for women could be derived? If so, that would contradict the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* (No. 53, on Nature and Culture).

2. The above-mentioned problems are nowadays often treated in the context of cultural anthropology, which studies the influence that social roles and stereotypical concepts have on the picture of women and femininity. What is the value of cultural anthropology, and what is the relation between cultural and philosophical anthropology?

3. How does the creation of humankind as man and woman relate to the structure of Salvation, to the mystery of the Incarnation and even to the Trinitarian mystery?

The following questions and recommendations for the final report resulted from the discussion:

- a. The admittance of women to ministères;
- b. A clear justification of the non-admittance of women to the priesthood, as it had already been brought up in the third session;
- c. Research on the sacramental character or non-sacramental character of the office of deacon for women, and the possible admittance of women to this church office;
- d. The reason why the ministères of lector and acolyte are open only to men;
- e. Research on the participation of women in the liturgy, in the light of the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the actual practice in various churches;
- f. The nomination of capable women to responsible positions in the Church, e.g. in the governing bodies of the Roman Curia;³²
- g. Research on the participation of non-ordained baptised lay people in the jurisdiction (in the broadest sense) of the Church. Women should be consulted in the revision of the Codex of Canon Law.

The Minority Note also came up during this discussion.

The majority of the commission members rejected this report. They did not share the views in the Note and they thought that it contained personal criticisms of individuals. They were willing to include some significant points from the Note under the Open Questions in the Final Document but, as it was put by a number of commission members, "...under no circumstances can the text as it is formulated be inserted into the Final Document; the mass media would grab such a text for the sake of sensation".

Various members of the 'group of five' had already received negative reactions regarding the Note. De la Potterie had asked Rie Vendrik during the first day of the meeting whether such a Minority Note really was necessary but Rie did not waver. Later that evening of the same day Le Guillou invited Rie to his room for a talk. He attacked several points of the Note but Rie refuted his interpretations of the text, insisting: "That is not written there!" She did, however, offer to consult with the others about the possibility of toning down some formulations.

The 'group of five' met on 30 January, the commission's free day, in order to decide what to do about the Minority Note. They were weighed down under the moral pressure that they had been experiencing both inside and outside the meeting. They decided, after consulting over the telephone with Pilar Bellosillo, to withdraw their request to include the Minority Note in the Final Document. Together they formulated a text that Vitoria Pinheiro would read in the meeting to be held the next day. The reasoning of the five was as follows: If we show ourselves amenable to a significant concession, the others will probably also offer some accommodation. In fact, they were hoping and expecting that the other commission members would not ask them to withdraw the Note, but just to tone down the text in such a way that the commission could accept it.

On Saturday afternoon 31 January, the commission, together with the committee for the Year of Women, was received in an audience with the Pope. This had a festive character, because it was the very last act, and this was expressed in the speech by the youngest female member, Deborah Seymour. She thanked the Pope for the task and the trust. She also pointed out, rather frankly, the weak spots: "The task entrusted to us was immense; our means, on the

³² Emma Cavalaro wrote: "Among the recommendations presented to the 1974 synod of bishops by the Study Commission on Women in Society and in the Church was one to the effect that the participation of women 'in posts involving effective and recognised responsibility' should be encouraged. One may hope that this recommendation has had some results in the various local churches, but there can be no doubt that at the curial level it has fallen on deaf ears." In: Emma Cavalaro, Women in the Roman Curia, In: *Concilium* 1970, Nr. 7, 52-55.

other hand, were very limited. The final dossier that we will present to you is a modest one. Some parts have been only superficially researched; certain documents give us little satisfaction”.³³

The Final Document had to be completed and approved that same afternoon.

To begin this crucial discussion, Vitoria Pinheiro spoke on behalf of the ‘group of five’:

“We wish first to emphasise the importance that we attach to the Note which we brought into the commission meeting; it was formulated after a wide-ranging exchange of ideas and much consideration and it has undergone many improvements. Considering that:

1. It was intended and created in a spirit of service to the commission and toward further research on the same problems;
2. The reception of the note caused difficulties here, as if it criticised persons, although in reality it criticised the working procedures;
3. Some members of the commission proposed to include certain parts of the note in the Final Document and to formulate the criticism on the working procedures in a letter to the president;

we consider the note in its entirety no longer useful for the realisation of the objectives of service that we had intended. Therefore the group of signatories, Pilar Bellosillo (who is ill) included, has decided to withdraw the note from the final dossier. We do not wish to be considered an opposition group in the commission since we have always done our best to bring forward ideas – sometimes different from those of others – which reflect a healthy pluralism.”

A number of remarks from the Minority Note were included in the Final Document at the suggestion of Sister Teresa.

Claire Delva and Rie Vendrik criticised Mrs. Graber-Duvernay’s ‘The History of the Study Commission’. There were categorical inaccuracies in the text, such as:

- ? “around five members of the commission rejected the method used and disputed the crux of the problem”. Who was meant here?
- ? The ‘group of five’ had, “out of disappointment, dissatisfaction and moral confusion”, written to the Pope “to ask him to accept their resignation (from the commission)”. That was incorrect; cf. the text of the letter to the Pope.
- ? “The five reconsidered their decision at the president’s urging.” On the contrary, the president did not exert any influence on the five.
- ? Language such as ‘rejected the method used’, ‘disputed the crux of the problem’, as well as the accusation that the ‘group of five’ had been guilty of destroying the whole atmosphere in the commission (“*un souffrance s’installe dans les coeurs et une inquietude dans les esprits*”) were entirely repudiated by Claire and Rie. These accusations were not only incorrect but also reaffirmed that differences of opinion were not tolerated in the commission.

Everyone agreed, after some discussion, that this historical text did not belong in the Final Document.

³³ In the French *Osservatore Romano*, 6 February 1976, 1.

Before the vote on the Final Document the president explained what exactly was to happen to this dossier:

All texts which had developed from the study and discussions of the whole commission were to be presented to the Pope, each document accompanied by some historical background and explanation.

These documents, together with reports of the six general meetings, would also be placed in the Vatican archives and made available to the authorities. They might later be useful to other church bodies and provide a better understanding of what was presented to the Pope.

Just at the time that Rosemary Goldie wanted to present the Final Document to the commission, the group was startled by a rumour circulating in the Vatican which was overheard by some commission members during the audience with the Pope: It was said that the Minority Note by the 'group of five' had been published in the Belgian newspapers. Everyone was thunderstruck, The five because of the false accusation of their duplicity, the others because of the provocative publication. Violent emotions burst out and accusations were directed against The Five: "Why did they not warn the other commission members?"

Claire Delva denied the rumour and the five insisted that they had sent the Note only to the president. In other words, if there was a leak somewhere it must be in Rome. Then Claire Delva telephoned the nuncio in Brussels, who confirmed that the Note had in fact not been published.

Mgr. Bartoletti finally succeeded in calming everyone down. He did not believe the rumour and trusted the declaration of Claire Delva. Unfortunately, however, the atmosphere in the meeting had been irreparably damaged and had, certainly for 'the five', become unworkable. These unexpected consternations had also caused the meeting to become pressed for time. It was decided to shift the closure of the session from 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Rosemary Goldie presented the (still provisional) Final Dossier and explained that there would first be a vote on the entire Final Document, then on entrusting the final editing to a small group under the direction of the president.

The Final Document was presented in the following form:

- I. **WOMEN IN A WORLD-WIDE SOCIETY, ANNO 1975**
Text by Biffi, to be amplified by suggestions from the discussion.
- II. **REPORT OF THE MEETINGS**
 - A. The Human Being, Man and Woman, in God's Plan**
 1. Introduction by Biffi
 2. The Human Being, Man and Woman ("*l'autre semblable*"), Contributions of Some Life Sciences, by Mrs. Graber-Duvernay
 3. A Biblical-Theological Contribution by De la Potterie
 - B. Participation of Women in Pastoral Responsibilities in the Church**
 1. Survey and Sources (Documentation)
 2. The female religious in the Church
 3. Report of the discussion on ministères
 - C. Concrete Proposals** and list of the members
- III. **REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**
 - A. Report of the presentation to the Synod of Bishops in October 1974

- B. Recommendations to the Synod about the contribution of women in the Church's work
- IV. PROPOSALS TO THE LOCAL CHURCHES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF WOMEN
- V. DOCUMENTS BY SPECIALISTS WHICH WILL BE INCLUDED UNDER THEIR OWN NAMES
- A. Some Philosophical Considerations, by Toinet
 - B. A Theological Contribution, by Le Guillou and Toinet
 - C. Cultural Anthropological Considerations on Women, by Artigas

The structure of the entire document was voted on first. The result was 14 votes in favour and 4 abstentions (the 'group of five' without Pilar).

Next a vote was taken on entrusting the president and his helpers with the completion of the definitive text (summaries, recommendations, open questions, revision of the social text and the historical presentation of the various documents).³⁴

The outcome of this vote was 10 votes in favour and 5 abstentions (Deborah Seymour joined the 'group of five') and she decided to sign the Minority Note³⁵

The president closed the last meeting with a comprehensive summary, drawing up the balance and considering the positive and negative aspects of the meetings. He ended his speech with the following words:

“If we weigh it all up together we can see it as valuable and I believe that we can end our collaboration in serenity and trust. We may entrust the fruits of our work to the Pope. When he considers it advisable, he will distribute these fruits in the Church, first of all passing them on to the Synod, to the Bishops' Conferences and thereafter to the whole Church in the midst of the World.”

That evening a heavy thunderstorm, with long-lasting rain showers, broke out over Rome.

V.4.3.2. Commentary

? The mood during this last general meeting reached a climax of frustration and distrust. The Minority Note met with great resistance whereas the criticism on the 'group of five' in the 'History of the Commission' and the rumour about newspaper publication of the Minority Note intensified the polarisation and suspicion. It was a dramatic all-time low, exactly at the end of the last meeting.

The discussion of and the vote on the Final Document had to take place in the last session. That meant hurried work which was also not conducive to a peaceful atmosphere.

³⁴ Rie Vendrik wrote in her notes: 'Vote de confidence: ce n'est pas normal! On sait ce qu'est la confiance ici à Rome....'

³⁵ On 1 March Rie Vendrik wrote to the other members of the 'group of five' that abstention in 'the vote of confidence was especially meant in regard to Rosemary Goldie, who carried the responsibility for the document'. Peter Hebblethwaite mentions in *Paul VI*, 641 'The signatories (of the Minority Note) were Maria del Pilar Bellosillo, Claire Delva, Marina Lessa, Maria Vittoria Pinheiro, Deborah A.Seymour, and they were joined by Maria Vendrik'.. Hebblethwaite bases himself always on thorough historical research. How to understand this embarrassing mistaken description? In the preceding lines he writes: 'What follows is based on documents supplied by Rosemary Goldie and conversations with her in Rome in June 1991.' Did he present the information inaccurately, or was the given information incorrect or tendentious?

- ? Biffi's text was an excellent sociological account of the situation of women, anno 1975. It would be worth the effort to study this wide-ranging document again, even today. The 'group of five' was pleased with his views. Their remarks in the Minority Note about the experts not taking enough account of the socio-cultural context did not relate to Biffi's text because it had not yet been seen.
- ? The Minority Note is an honest, clear and constructive document. It was motivated by a sense of responsibility to reveal the pluriformity of opinions in the commission. It contains criticism of the procedures, not persons. This in contrast to the 'History of the Study Commission' in which the 'group of five' was reproached for spoiling the atmosphere in the commission.
- ? It was a courageous deed of the 'five' to follow the president's advice and bring the Minority Note to the plenary meeting, thereby risking that the majority of the commission members would reject it. In this way they remained faithful to their own convictions. It is therefore all the more regrettable that they finally bowed to the rejection of their request to include the note in the Final Document. Their capitulation demonstrates the heavy moral and psychological pressure which was brought to bear upon them. The 'five' had to endure – in the meeting, in the breaks, in the corridors – so much criticism that they finally could not hold out against it in that climate of suspicion and polarisation. The forces exerted against them were just too strong.
- ? The five were not very realistic in their hope that the other members would not require them to withdraw the note, but only to soften some of the criticism.
- ? The question remains: Who launched the rumour about the publication of the Minority Note? In keeping with Vatican tradition, no one ever knows the answer to this kind of question.
- ? At the vote on the Final Document only fourteen (of the twenty-five) commission members gave their fiat to this dossier. The declaration of confidence in the small Roman group that were to take on the editing of the Final Document received even less approval. It is significant that only ten members expressed their trust.
- ? One wonders, here as well as at the vote in the third general meeting, where the absent members were. Did they leave in order to evade voting?.....
- ? The heavy thunderstorm that broke out over Rome at the close of the meeting evokes comparison with the end of the First Vatican Council in 1870, where the infallibility of the Pope had been proclaimed. A heavy thunderstorm with driving rain also broke out at that time.

During that Council there were voting members who left prematurely in order to avoid having to vote on the question of Papal infallibility.

V. 5. Continuing contacts after January 1976

1. The 'Group of Five'
2. Commentary
3. Breaking the Silence

V.5.1. The 'Group of Five'

Claire, Marina, Rie and Vitoria returned home dismayed, frustrated and tired. They felt that all their work, study and struggle had been to no avail. During the first weeks they preferred not to talk about the commission, and only got going again after the disappointment had somewhat subsided.

Rie wrote to Mgr. Bartoletti on 23 February, expressing on behalf of the 'five' their disappointment and reiterated that she did not understand why the Minority Note could not have been included into the Final Document, since this dossier would be seen only by the Pope and not published in any wider context. Rie asked whether the Note could not still be inserted, as an appendix to the report of the sixth meeting. She also pointed out that, although the study commission was disbanded, the report of the last session was still to be presented to its members for their approval. The draft of the Final Document was also to be sent to all members before it was presented to the Pope.

Rie received no answer to this letter.

On 7 March, Rosemary Goldie wrote to the commission members that Mgr. Bartoletti had had a heart attack on 2 March and another on 5 March which proved fatal. He died that very night.

In April 1976, the commission members received the report of the last plenary meeting and the Final Document, which had already been presented to the Pope.

Between 1976 and 1981, the 'group of five' remained in regular contact. From their correspondence it appears that 'the five' had promised each other never to reveal publicly anything about the Minority Note, or about the state of affairs during the commission meetings.

They thought that they ought to keep silent about their experiences in the study commission because of their loyalty, love and care for the Church. As an exception the bishops of the Synod of 1975 received the Minority Note³⁶ 'for the sake of the truth of the dossier'. The five also gave it to a very few others, but always under strict secrecy.³⁷

The editorial board of the monthly 'Kosmos en Oecumene', of which Rie was a member, asked her to write about the result of the study commission but she refused because the 'five' had chosen to maintain their silence. However, Rie took it upon her to write for the 'group of five' the history of the Papal Commission and the experiences of the five within it. She felt a responsibility not to let the unique history of this episode be buried in oblivion. The other four applauded her intention. Claire wrote on 25 August 1976:

"Rie, you let us know that you are going to write the history of our experience and we are convinced that it will be first-rate. Have you started yet? I still have piles of papers about the commission.... Every time I read the Minority Note I find it excellent."

In the course of time, however, the 'five' asked themselves if this communal promise of silence was actually wise and honest towards the church and especially towards women in the church. On 15 November 1980 Pilar wrote to the other four that a Norwegian theologian, Kari Elisabeth Børresen, had asked to be allowed to use the Minority Note and some details from the last plenary meeting of the commission for an article that she was going to publish in *Concilium*.

Pilar wondered if now was the right moment for the church? Would it not be better to wait until quieter times? On the other hand, if they waited too long, nobody would be interested any more. She thought that it might be better if someone from the 'group of five' would write about the note. "We are well informed about how things went and in what spirit we worked..... On the other hand, a critical theologian, who shares our viewpoint entirely, would

³⁶ See *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 108, p. 16.

³⁷ Claire gave the note to Cardinal Suenens and to Professor Thils, whereas Rie showed it to Marga Klompé (Minister of Social Affairs in the Netherlands). Pilar, Marina and Vitoria gave the note likewise to some bishops in their own country.

make a greater impression on the clerical men who concede not the slightest authority to ordinary women like us”.

Although Pilar was asking the other four for advice, she emphasised that for any publication the consent of all five would be required.

In her answer on 14 December, Claire suggested that it would be better if one ‘of us’ wrote about the Minority Note and she proposed that Rie, who was after all – as Pilar had written – ‘the mother of the note’, should undertake this task. Marina had the same doubts about publication via Kari Børresen and she expressed these in a letter of 5 January 1981. Pepe Icaza, a member of the Council for the Laity, had previously approached her about writing an article on ‘the failure of the commission’. She had refused in order not to breach the promise of silence. When Pepe Icaza heard this response, he had said: “That is incomprehensible. You five, you are shirking the truth”.

Marina actually agreed with him and therefore wrote at the end of her letter:

“At that time we had reason to remain silent, but in the course of the years our silence has only helped to preserve the discrimination against women in the church.... Therefore I think that it is now a moral obligation to keep our silence no longer..... Let us admit that keeping silence is easier than expressing an opinion!”

The five did not reach an agreement on the publication by Kari Børresen; that is proven by Kari’s article in ‘Concilium’, in which neither the study commission nor the Minority Note is mentioned.³⁸

V.2. Commentary

? After the debacle of the Roman Study Commission the hopeful expectations of many Catholics and especially of the women who looked out for a renewed Church, ended in deep disappointment and indignation about the ‘results’ of the commission. For many people the Study Commission was already written off as a waste of time, since the confidential ‘Pro memoria’ explained that women’s ordination was no part of the commission’s brief.³⁹ Some people even thought that the commission had achieved so little result because the members had not strongly defended the case of women. This was painful for the ‘group of five’, all the more since they did not want to defend themselves openly. The proclamation of the Roman rejection of the ordination of women made the situation even more depressing for them. On 15 October 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the ‘Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood.’ It was the Vatican’s response to the growing women’s-ordination-movement among catholic women and to the recent decisions made in the Anglican Church. For most catholics the Declaration came as a disaster just like the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. However, for the ‘group of five’ it came as a personal repudiation of their efforts over the last three years. Nevertheless they held on firmly to their own convictions. The ending of the mandate of the commission did not bring an end to their work, or to their commitment with and for women. They remained in contact with each other and reconsidered the work which had been carried out. It is tragic that these

³⁸ Kari Børresen, Women and Men in the Creation Narratives and in the Church, in *Concilium* 1981, Nr.6, 62-70.

³⁹ Archbishop Bartoletti wrote in his memo presented personally to the Paul VI at Castelgandolfo in August 1975: ‘The commission has been suspect from both sides: “conservatives” saw in it the threat of women’s ordination and other unheard of novelties; “liberals” regarded it as a way of saving time (for the Vatican) and dodging the question’ In: P. Hebblethwaite, Paul VI, 642.

five women never received open appreciation, but rather negative criticism and distrust, for all their work and serious contribution in those three years.

- ? Almost nothing was heard about the Final Document and the media displayed little interest. The *Osservatore Romano* reported the closing of the commission and published its recommendations. Claire was probably right when she wrote on 26 August 1979: “This dossier has, no doubt, disappeared into a drawer or wastepaper basket (to be burned, I assume). . . .”
- ? The agreement to keep silent was not based on the pledge of secrecy imposed by the Vatican but stemmed from an idealistic notion of loyalty and from a somewhat misplaced reserve. Was the moral and psychological pressure so strong that these women, otherwise so steadfast, yielded to self-censorship? It was, seen from the present time, no service to the church, certainly not to women, and it did not correspond with what Rie had written in an earlier letter (17 June 1975) about not being allowed to remain silent: “... Because we have an obligation to the Church and especially to women in the whole world... I would wish that we might have the courage to speak for the well-being of the whole church...” They did speak: in Rome, but afterwards they kept silent within the church community for eleven long years. In that sense Pepe Icaza was right when he said: “That is incomprehensible. You five, you are shirking the truth”
- ? Why did Rie’s plan to write the history of the commission ultimately come to nothing? The correspondence among the five does not provide any information on this subject. Rie probably abandoned the plan in view of the deteriorating relationship between the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands and the powers that be in the Vatican. The state of her health may also have played a role.

V. 5. 3. Breaking the Silence: 1987

After years of deliberating together, the five women decided to publish the Minority Note, together with a short historical survey and some supporting texts, including the letter of Karl Rahner to De la Potterie. The editors of *Pro Mundi Vita* in Louvain made a complete bulletin available to them.

In the autumn of 1987 a Synod of Bishops was to be held on ‘Vocation and Mission of the Laity in Church and World’. This provided an excellent occasion in the spring of 1987 to publish the bulletin under the title ‘Women Make an Appeal to the Shepherds of the Church’.

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This bulletin was sent to all participants in the Synod of Bishops.

Deborah Seymour also signed the Minority Note in the bulletin.

Rie did not live to see this publication, having died in 1982. She had, however, participated in the original design of the bulletin. It would surely have given her satisfaction that the work of women in the study commission finally achieved a certain completion.

Nevertheless, the silence was only partly broken. They did not write the story of the Vatican’s methods of controlling the commission.

Marie-Thérèse van Lunen-Chenu expressed her great appreciation for the work of the five women and called the Minority Note a valuable, courageous and, unfortunately, still relevant text:

“After eleven years, what does the courage of these six competent and conscientious women mean to us? What does it tell us? They were forced to choose the narrow path of a Minority Note which could only be shown to a few high-ranking shepherds. It shows us clearly how great an effect the forces of Church-Institutional influence had on the women in the commission, on the

⁴⁰ *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 108, 1987, p. 1.

bishops who let themselves be lulled into sleep, and on ourselves if we ignore the voice of conscience of these deeply committed women”.⁴¹

A year later, in 1988, another description of the work of the study commission was published, but seen from another angle, namely by Rosemary Goldie: ‘Bartoletti e il ruolo della donna nella Chiesa e nella società’ (*Bartoletti and the Role of Women in the Church and in Society*) in: *Un Vescovo Italiano del Concilio, Enrico Bartoletti, 1916 – 1976*, Genua 1988. This article does not offer new information but is certainly interesting because Goldie’s account of the work of the study commission clarifies the manner in which she fulfilled her secretarial task. Her admiration and even reverence for the president of the commission, Mgr. Bartoletti, determined the way in which she functioned as its secretary. She described the work and significance of the study commission from his perspective and exuberantly praised the way in which he presided. There was no trace of criticism of Vatican manipulations, no mention of the Minority Note and no mention of the genuine contributions of the ‘group of five’. In fact, according to Rosemary Goldie the ‘five’ were only a mouthpiece for radical feminist attitudes. She simply ignored the reality that all five were board members of national and international catholic women’s organisations, and that the visions to which they gave voice were alive throughout the world. Rosemary’s account of Mgr. Bartoletti’s study commission was strikingly selective and defensive and remained obedient to Vatican policy.

⁴¹ M.Th. van Lunen-Chenu, ‘Des femmes en appellent aux pasteurs de l’Eglise’, in *Femmes et Hommes dans l’Eglise*, No. 30, June 1987, 27-28.

