

## Chapter VI

### Retrospective

For the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic Church a special commission had been established to study the position of women in society and in the church.

A number of women and men from different social, cultural and national backgrounds came together in Rome, with great expectations and enthusiasm. They met there in six plenary meetings, spread over more than two years. All of them were of goodwill and hoped to bring about some important renewal.

A number of interesting matters were brought up by the commission. Biffi's sociological document is an excellent survey of the situation of women in society which remains valuable even today. Hamel's article, distributed during the first plenary session, gave a good description of some of the causes of sexism in the catholic church and pointed out the importance of women theologians.

The following are the documents from the study commission which were published:

1. The report presented to the Synod of Bishops on 23 October 1974<sup>1</sup>
2. A documentation file for the International Year of Women (1975) which was sent to the Bishops' Conferences and distributed from there. This information file was drawn up by the committee for The Year of Women (= the 'Study Commission' plus 15 added members).
3. The recommendations of the study commission, published in August 1976<sup>2</sup>

The final report of the commission was not published, but only presented to the Pope.

"Its final recommendations were submitted to the Pontifical Council for the Laity. That was the official version. In practice they went into Rosemary Goldie's archives, whence they were dispensed to students of goodwill. One could speak of a diffuse effect of the commission which, however, ended with the death of Pope Paul VI".<sup>3</sup>

When one considers the work of the commission as a whole, one can only conclude that the commission members, all of goodwill, had produced a final document that did not lead to a real breakthrough in the opinions of the Church concerning women.

In this retrospective look at the work of the study commission the following questions arise.

1. Did the commission fulfil its task?

If one begins with the request of Cardinal Flahiff at the Synod of Bishops in 1971, the answer has to be negative, for he had requested: a thorough study of the possibilities of ecclesiastical functions in the church for women. The commission likewise fell short of the expectations of many in the Roman Catholic Church, men as well as women. Hans Küng had expressed such expectations as early as 1968 when he pleaded for the complete participation of women in the life of the church, referring to:

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Femmes et Hommes dans l'Eglise*, Nr. 11, December 1974, 16-20.

<sup>2</sup> For the recommendations of the Study Commission and the Committee for the International Womens' Year, see *Archief van de Kerken*, jrg. 31, Nr. 21, 12 October 1976, 921-932.

<sup>3</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 667.

“...Competent women in all the above-mentioned decision-making commissions, from parish council to the Council for the Laity of the whole church. Education and training of women for active co-responsibility on various levels. Promotion of the study of theology by women and also the corresponding activity of teaching theology. Revision of many liturgical texts and canon laws which discriminate against women. Admittance of women deacons and serious study of the specific conditions for the ordination of women to the priesthood, against which there are no biblical or dogmatic arguments.”<sup>4</sup>

If the papal study commission had received the task described here by Küng, and if it had worked in that direction, it would then have responded to the intention of Cardinal Flahiff.

In the presentation of the study commission the task was thus specified:

“...to study the specific role of women in society, and the relation of man and woman on the basis of their radical equality but also in the light of their differences and complementarity. This analysis will be based on objective research in which the different life situations, the happy and unhappy circumstances of women in the world, their longings and frustrations, are as far as possible considered.... such an analysis should be performed in the light of the Christian concepts of women and with a view to the pastoral mission of the Church in this field.”

There certainly were discussions on the equality of men and women, with emphasis on complementarity and the specific nature of women. There was, however, hardly any possibility for objective, open, and free scientific analysis. Biblical, theological and anthropological concepts that were not in keeping with the traditional Vatican ideas were rejected in the meetings and not recorded in the Final Document.

The life situations, longings and frustrations of women received very little attention, because of the deductive method which prevailed,

The secret Pro Memoria stated:

“Right from the beginning of the research the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood should be excluded”.

The question of women and priesthood was neither investigated nor discussed in the commission. During the second plenary session, however, the president proposed, because of some questions, that the commission should ask the Pope to clearly justify the non-admittance of women to the priesthood.

The ministères non-ordonnés, also recommended by the Pro Memoria, were hardly discussed. This issue of the ministères had been imposed on the study commission by the Congregation of the Sacraments. The women commission members rejected it unanimously.

From the point of view of Vatican church policies, the commission produced an ambivalent result. In the public sphere, the Pope (and the *Osservatore Romano*) had made a show of this Papal Commission during the Year of Women. It was nevertheless extremely embarrassing for the Vatican authorities that the commission had proved controversial in the media right from the beginning and that the fundamental discord within the commission had come to light. That is the reason why the commission was hushed up by the Vatican in January 1976.

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<sup>4</sup> H.Küng, *Wahrhaftigkeit: zur Zukunft der Kirche*, Freiburg 1965, 224/25..

Nobody ever heard about the Final Document, presented to the Pope.

## 2. Which influences played an important role in the meetings?

### a. *Group Formation:*

Right from the start, a small (and sometimes shifting) Roman group determined the direction of the commission. This group, chiefly made up of Rosemary Goldie, Mrs. Graber-Duvernay, Mrs. Collini-Lombardi, Le Guillou and Toinet, carried out the preparatory work for the meetings and later wrote the final versions of the provisional documents.

In reaction to the traditional concepts of the Roman group, the 'group of five' stood for another anthropological and theological vision of woman, developed during the first plenary session. Together with some outstanding theologians, they studied the commission documents and brought their own texts into the meetings. The 'group of five' were outspoken in these meetings.

Some other women, such as Sister Teresa, Deborah Seymour and Mrs. Bahintchie, were often of the same opinion as the five but, for various reasons, they did not openly support them. Of the male members Biffi and Hamel certainly supported the 'group of five', at least in the early phases.

### b. *Directive Leadership:*

Rome clearly exerted directive leadership in the meetings. Such a style is sometimes good and necessary but should, nevertheless, be open to criticism and adaptation. It becomes questionable if it works manipulatively and exclusively to maintain and strengthen the established power. It is still more dubious when such a policy is religiously legitimised by calling upon Revelation for its foundation. Such a directive leadership is characterized by manipulation and intimidation.

In his work, *Papal Power. A Study of Vatican Control over Lay Elites*, the religious sociologist Jean-Guy Vaillantcourt<sup>5</sup> investigated the way in which the Vatican (i.e. Pope and Roman Curia) controls lay groups and their organisations. The Vatican employs a variety of methods to maintain power over lay people in the church. Vaillantcourt's description is quoted here and each item is then applied to the situation of the study commission.

- **Ecological power, based on the physical control of environmental conditions, controlling people through the domination of their environment.**

Study Commission: The impressive environment of the Vatican City; the grand hall in Pallazzo San Calisto; a 'sacred' atmosphere.

- **Remunerative power, based on material or non-material rewards or compensations.**

Study Commission: Outspoken appreciation for obedience; Pope and commission president praised dedicated co-operation; a special audience with the Pope including a group photograph of the study commission with him; address to the Pope by the youngest commission member; presentation of the work of the study commission to the Synod of

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<sup>5</sup> J. Vaillantcourt, *Papal Power. A Study of Vatican Control over Lay Elites*, Berkeley 1980, a dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley.

Bishops.

- **Coercive power, based on physical or psychic violence.**

Study Commission: Pressure by subtle intimidation; casting doubt on the integrity of opponents; risk of removal of function and career for the theological advisers of the 'group of five'; members with different opinions regarded as opponents.

- **Use of social mechanisms.**

Study Commission: Selective recruiting of female members from very different backgrounds, which appears democratic but is in fact a means of hindering shared reflection and potential bonding in opposition; language in the meetings at first only French, and some documents only in Italian, providing barriers for those members with insufficient knowledge of these languages; co-optation of experts; exclusion of consultants with divergent viewpoints; censoring of press information; biased coverage in *Osservatore Romano*; spreading rumours; encouraging mistrust.

- **Use of legal and administrative power.**

Study Commission: A secret Pro Memoria, in which the task of the study commission had been precisely established and limited beforehand; a designated president and secretary; no voice given to catholic women's organisations in the selection of members; directive leadership style; obscure procedures and hidden agendas; late distribution of documents; subtle and unmistakable manipulations; imposition of a vote of confidence; withholding of relevant information; pledges of secrecy; disregard of critical proposals.

- **Traditional power, based on the use of traditional symbols, rituals, ideas and sentiments.**

Study Commission: Stimulation of loyalty by means of repeated appeals to faith in and love for the church; exhortations to build on the impressive contributions of women in past times; presentation of the church as the champion of women's emancipation throughout history; regular references to texts and concepts from previous times; stress on fidelity to the tradition of the church; use of high-flown language; reference to noble ideals; promises of vital tasks for women in the future of the church.

- **Expert power, based on professional, technical or scientific, or purely rational arguments.**

Study Commission: Experts in fields of exegeses, theology and human sciences were, with only one exception, both male and exponents of the Vatican point of view; experts drafted the working documents and determined content and direction of discussions; female members not skilled theologians; unnecessarily complicated presentations, which made women feel incompetent; inequality in church status between lay and clergy.

It is clear that these control mechanisms were effective: the Study Commission did not yield results which could threaten Roman policy. The women, with both their newly-found self-consciousness and new experiences in the church were treated as a small and irritating minority group, whereas they were, in fact, representative of the vast majority of women.

Their so-called 'Minority Note', reflecting in reality the point of view of the world-wide majority was excluded from the Final Report. Obviously it was felt that the catholic community must remain unaware of the opposing ideas of those women who had dared to depart from the prescribed catholic unity.

### **3. How did the 'Group of Five' fare?**

The conflict with the entrenched Roman attitudes intensified the bonds within the Group and the self-conscience of the 'five'. Regarding these developments, Claire said:

"The manipulations stimulated our awakening".

During the meetings the 'five' resolutely rejected time and again the hierarchical concepts of man and woman and the image of women embedded therein. The texts which they contributed reflected the insights of modern anthropology and biblical sciences in the commission. Thus they demonstrated that other images of women than those presented by the Roman theologians can be found in biblical revelation.

Rie Vendrik played an important role in the commission. She was the driving force in the 'group of five' and the 'mother of the Minority Note'. She had an important and clear contribution in the meetings. She was ready to stand up for, and even sometimes fight for, what she saw as right; she never lost her balance in spite of the opposition. It was clear that some of the Roman commission members appreciated her integrity.

The efforts of Claire, Marina, Rie, Pilar and Vitoria were specially aimed at the rejection of obsolete views. Nevertheless, they were not qualified to create a new view on theological anthropology of man and woman. At the beginning of the Seventies the feminist movement in the church was just beginning.

Several times the 'group of five' considered leaving the commission, but they thought that in staying, they could still have some influence.

It would not have been the first time that members of a Roman commission resigned out of dissatisfaction with the working methods and the disregard for non-traditional ideas. Karl Rahner, who had participated in the Theological Commission from 1969 onwards, resigned in 1974. In 1977 the Canadian Jesuit David Stanley left the Papal Biblical Commission because the research findings of this commission were ignored.

Functioning in a Roman study commission weighs heavily on people who set great store by openness and freedom in scientific research. However the five women of this commission finally made the crucial decision to stay on, in the hope that they would eventually be able to exercise some influence to the good.

Were the efforts of the 'group of five' in vain? No, definitely not! Thanks to their critical stance and their persistent opposition to the ideological point of view of the Roman theologians, they managed, in spite of massive manipulation from beginning to end, to prevent the *publication* of the Final Document. This meant that no document offered to the world the affirmation and support of Vatican policies by grateful women, proud to be allowed to take part in a papal commission. That is a unique performance! No other international papal commission was ever able to unsettle the machinations of the Vatican so thoroughly. For the first time women themselves expressed, autonomously and using their actual experience of the contemporary world, how they understood and theologically valued the new self-consciousness of women. This was a far cry from listening respectfully while Roman

theologians explained how the religious ideology of the church would teach them about their own womanhood.

At first they often had the feeling that their efforts had been in vain. Their contribution was, after all, not accepted, so that a very one-sided Final Document was produced. Upon reflection, however, they could be satisfied by what they had actually achieved. They had openly criticised and contradicted the Vatican teaching on women which had been presented authoritatively, and as an eternal truth. The five had expressed their own vision and the vision of other women, thereby bringing about a salutary 'interruption' of a long undisturbed doctrine, an interruption of the type described by J.B. Metz.<sup>6</sup> No matter how systematic the intimidation and manipulation was, and however much the 'five' had suffered, they did not fall into subservient silence. They spoke up and repeatedly said what had to be said, in solidarity with all those women on whose behalf they were working.

For women in this day and age their words remain recognisable as a courageous and prophetic cry from the centre of the lion's den. The renewal for which The five had fought continues in the grass roots of the church. In spite of the (infallible) pronouncements of Rome, women and men continue to take responsibility for themselves and build a community of equal disciples. As Penny Lernoux wrote at the end of her book on the contemporary crisis in the Catholic Church, "The people of God will continue their march, despite the power plays and intrigue in Rome".<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. What was the central conflict in the Study Commission?**

The clash between different views was mainly caused by the difference in anthropological vision. This was clearly seen in the contradictions between the papers brought in by the 'group of five' and the documents presented by the commission experts De la Potterie, Le Guillou and Toinet, with the traditional dualistic anthropology of the church manifesting itself especially in the texts of the last two.

The same approach was also apparent in Pope Paul VI's address on 31 January 1976 during the last audience for the members of the study commission. On the one hand the Pope reiterated the christian principle of equality of man and woman as children of God, on the other hand he emphasised the characteristic individuality of each, particularly of women. He spoke of the contribution of women in the church as that especially resulting from the human and spiritual richness of women. He further warned in this speech against the dangers of modern concepts of equality which ignored the specific nature of women and could lead them to risk becoming masculine or even losing their own personality.<sup>8</sup>

What strikes us in this address is also to be seen in other papal documents and pronouncements. They are characterised by a particular ambiguity. The equality of man and woman as human beings is first expressed, then quickly followed by emphatic insistence upon the different natures of the sexes. The recognition of the equality of persons is a concession to the awakening and aspirations of women in modern times, and an adaptation to developments in society. These pronouncements sound quite hopeful, but then the hope is thwarted by what follows. By emphasizing the typical nature of women and their specific role, they make sure that the age-old vision of the nature of woman, created by God, remains preserved as the

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<sup>6</sup> J.B. Metz, *Unterbrechungen. Theologisch-politische Perspektiven und Profile*, Gütersloh, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Penny Lernoux, *People of God. The Struggle for World Catholicism*, New York, 1989, 417.

<sup>8</sup> For the Pope's address, see the French *Osservatore Romano*, 6 February 1976, and the English translation in *Origins*, 19 February 1976.

central point of argumentation. This ambiguity in the reasoning provides a method of ignoring the consequences of the recognition of equality of human beings.

The Vatican pronouncements on women reflect a dualistic anthropology. The old doctrine of subordination of women has been left behind; men and women are equal as human beings. Their relationship is described with help of a model of 'polarity'. The nature of men and the nature of women are seen as two opposite poles, each with its own unique characteristics from which the other sex is excluded.

The difference between the two guarantees each its own unchanging identity. Men and women are thus related to each other in equality and in complementarity; equal as human beings, and at the same time fundamentally different as men and women, as expressed in the specific role which each one fulfils, whereby the masculine role and the feminine role are complementary, i.e. each essentially supplementing the other.

This anthropological model of polarity and complementarity is radically rejected in the field of Womens' Studies. This dualism in fact simply disguises the existence of discrimination against women. In an androcentric society and culture the qualities traditionally ascribed to women have lower status and value than the qualities attributed to men. This leads inevitably to a structure of dominance and subordination. This anthropological viewpoint which proclaims equality and yet legitimatises the practice of inequality obviously contains a contradiction within itself.

Women have long since seen thru this contradiction. A memorandum was drawn up at a colloquium of the WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Womens' Organisations) in Paris in April 1969. In this memo the women requested "discriminatory measures with regard to women should be reformed, and there should no longer be a contradiction between the affirmation of the Gospel principle of equality of the sexes and the justification of inequality in practice and in discipline."<sup>9</sup>

Another study group, the **Pastoral Commission of the Congregation of the Evangelisation of Peoples**, was active in Rome during the Year of Women. In 1976 this commission published a study on:

**'The Role of Women in Evangelisation'**.<sup>10</sup> It was the result of investigation by groups and female congregations which were active in evangelical work.

This document was dealing with the 'specific role of women' in this work. That approach was justified by the presupposition that "the biological differentiation of the sexes and the complementarity in the physical procreation of life is intended by God to be extended to every human enterprise, including evangelisation".<sup>11</sup>

This study contained descriptions of qualities seen as specifically feminine, such as a great capacity for intimate personal relations: "A woman is better suited to all that relates to life rather than to structures, she has a great capacity for loving, for self-sacrifice....., sensitivity towards the individual person and practical initiative based on an intuitive grasp of the proper response to be made to the aspirations of mankind. Man, on the other hand, was viewed as a being of ideas, more suited to what relates to structures and leadership roles in the formulation of ideology and administration at the highest level".<sup>12</sup>

The specific role of women in evangelisation therefore rests on those specific qualities of her charisma. The following examples of the functions of women in the field of pastoral work that

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<sup>9</sup> *Pro Mundi Vita*, Bulletin 108, 1987, No. 1.,. 4.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Origins* 4, 1976, 702-707.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Butler, The Catholic Theological Society of America Research Report 'Women in the Church and Society. Considered in the Light of the Question of Women's Ordination', 1989, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, 7-8.

were proposed are: catechesis, preparation for the sacraments, liturgical functions which are not reserved for priests.....

It is striking that this text included an exact copy of the dualistic anthropology which characterised all that the Vatican said about women.

It remains remarkable that these two parallel commissions had no intercommunication.

What a contrast is presented by these two commissions when compared to other study meetings that took place at the same time, such as:

The conference **Sexism in the 1970s: Discrimination against Women**, held in Berlin 15-22 June 1974.<sup>13</sup>

It was here that 140 women from 49 countries and from different churches, social and cultural backgrounds met for an intensive study of women in Society and in the Church. In plenary sessions, study groups and personal encounters they exchanged their views on various subjects, freely and with respect for everyone's opinion but without neglecting their differences. Liselotte Nold said in her summary:

“There was room for conflicts and contacts, for humour and gravity, for independence and interdependence, for sorrow and gaiety, for emotions and for the intellect, all of which had their rightful place. Discovering that each of us had something to give to the others encouraged us to be our distinctive selves, without this causing anxiety....”<sup>14</sup>

A great number of valuable recommendations on women in society and in the church came out of that study week. These were then discussed in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in 1975.

The international colloquium **Women and Men as Partners in Christian Communities**, 25-30 August 1975 in Louvain-Heverlee (Belgium). This ecumenical colloquium on the values and ambiguities of partnership between women and men in Christian communities was organized by Pro Mundi Vita in cooperation with the World Council of Churches with WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women Organisations), the Lutheran World Federation, ‘Femmes et Hommes dans l’Eglise’, the Christian Family Movement, and CIDHAL (Comunicacion e Intercambio para el Desarrollo Humano en America Latina) in Mexico. About 100 women and men from 25 countries took part in it. The liberation of both women and men for new patterns of partnership was studied and discussed by the participants, using personal experience and personal knowledge and from the angle of her or his position of responsibility. The colloquium thus became an original contribution to the International Women’s Year.

From the ‘group of five’ Pilar Bellosillo, Claire Delva, Marina Lessa and Rie Vendrik were able to participate in this colloquium. The reflections and dialogues during the meetings were greatly stimulating for them, and they felt uplifted and recharged with energy and conviction to carry on with the Minority Note. From the General Statement of this colloquium, some parts were important for their position in the Study Commission:

? ‘The Church should not reject the gift of women for christian service. Women cannot be refused ordination solely on the basis of their sex.’

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<sup>13</sup> See: *Sexism in the 1970s, Discrimination against Women, A Report of a World Council of Churches Consultation*, West Berlin 1974, Geneva 1975. For the first time in official church circles the word ‘sexism’ was used here, recognising that sexism is a structural given and a social and cultural pattern in which women are kept in a subordinate role at all costs, not only in society but also in the church.

<sup>14</sup> Liselotte Nold, ‘None of us returns home the woman she was when she came’. In: *Sexism in the 1970s*, 132.

- ? 'It is important that women accept their responsibilities in the realm of theological reflection, trusting their own experience, that is, paying particular attention to the inductive method. We must revise the symbolism which leads to discriminate against women.'
- ? 'Traditional sexist language must be modified, in particular in theological discourse and in liturgical texts.'<sup>15</sup>

The Conference **Women in Future Priesthood Now: a Call to Action**, held in Detroit, 28 – 30 November 1975.

The interest for the subject of this conference surpassed all expectations. 1200 persons participated, among them two Catholic bishops. It was a historical moment; for the first time the catholic community had been convened on the question of the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. It was an impressive expression of the new self concept of women and men in the church as 'People of God.'<sup>16</sup>

For the 'group of five' the report about this conference was stimulating. In the midst of their struggle against a patriarchal Roman church, they saw here visualized a hopeful beginning: New Women, New Church, New Priestly Ministry.

## In Conclusion

It is clear that the study commission on women fell short of the expectations of many. No reforming projects or even ideas emanated from the commission. In the meetings and in the Final Document very little appeared that was not already known.

As Marie-Therèse van Lunen-Chenu has said: "The commission did not have the necessary freedom to sketch a plan of real co-operation and participation of women in the life of the church. Apart from the fact that the commission did not have the proper means, the structure and task of the commission were absolutely not attuned to the existing problems".<sup>17</sup>

After studying the Synod of Bishops of 1980, J. Grootaers and J. Selling came to the conclusion that the Papal document *Familiaris consortio* could just as well have been written if the synod had not taken place.<sup>18</sup> A similar conclusion could be drawn concerning the Final Document of the study commission on women. Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy wrote:

"Only the majority side was presented [in the final report]. Lacking was the healthy pluralism that could have been the catalyst for moving forward. The commission was worse than nothing. It gave the appearance of responding to the Synod's recommendation, while masking the stagnation regarding women in the Church".<sup>19</sup>

The free and independent work of the Study Commission was thwarted by machinations and pressure tactics, exactly as had happened some years before with the work of the Papal Birth Control Commission: in place of the impressive Majority Report 'Responsible Parenthood' came the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). What Sidney Callahan wrote regarding the tragic

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<sup>15</sup> *Pro Mundi Vita* 59, March 1976 'Women and Men as Partners in Christian Communities, 11

<sup>16</sup> Anne Marie Gardiner (ed.), *Women and Catholic Priesthood: an Expanded Vision. Proceedings of the Detroit Ordination Conference*, New York 1976.

<sup>17</sup> M.Th. van Lunen-Chenu, 'La commission pontificale de la femme. Une occasion manqué', in *Etudes*, June 1976, 891.

<sup>18</sup> J. Grootaers and J. Selling, *The 1980 Synod of Bishops "On the Role of the Family". An Exposition of the Event and an Analysis of its Texts*, Louvain 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House. The Women of Vatican II*, New York 1996, 262.

result of this commission, can just as well be said about the Study Commission on Women in Society and in the Church: 'An outcome from this painful episode and its disturbing aftermath of repression of dissent is a stronger realization of the need for structural reform in the exercise of Roman Catholic Church authority. Vatican II's collegial vision must be put into practice.'<sup>20</sup>

## **Final Remarks**

### **What did this historical research yield?**

The objective of this study was to get an insight into the life and work of Rie Vendrik, with a special focus on her participation in the Papal Commission on Women.

The research led to a number of surprising findings:

- ? The exploration of the person Rie Vendrik revealed her great energy, her organisational capacity and her fight on behalf of women, especially in the church. Because of her many-sided talents, she was asked to serve in, and was greatly appreciated by many national and international organisations. From all we can learn about her, a picture emerges of a wise, courageous, honest and steadfast woman with both vision and patience. Her person and her life must command admiration.
- ? When we follow Rie into the Pontifical commission, we meet four other women – Claire Delva, Marina Lessa, Pilar Bellosillo and Vitoria Pinheiro – who, together with Rie, distinguished themselves by their serious study, clear and critical stands and perseverance in the face of opposition. The difficulties and negative experiences of the inequality of power between women and men undergone by the 'group of five' are still to be found in our own time.
- ? Study and analysis of the commission meetings has revealed the Vatican's ways of achieving its own ends. Hardly anything has been published about all this, as reports of the meetings and the reflections of the study gatherings of the 'group of five' were not available until recently. Studying the sources that are now available has brought a certain aspect of recent church history out of the shadows and into the light.

### **What did this research mean to the author?**

First of all the research on the work of the commission gave me insight into a chapter of actual church history that particularly concerned women. This permitted me to understand the conception of women which is typical in Roman thought and pronouncements.

I have further come to understand how useful and important it is to sift through history and especially the history of women, not only in order to bring the past to light but also for the sake of the future. Visualising the past makes a new future possible. In the process of emancipation of women in the church, a clear picture of the past can be a 'midwife' for the future.

### **The Dinner Party**

In her book about the Dinner Party project Judy Chicago gives three criteria which women had to meet in order to sit at the Table or take a place on the Heritage Floor of the Foremothers:

1. Did the woman make a significant contribution to Society?
2. Did she attempt to improve conditions for women?

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<sup>20</sup> Sidney Callahan, Foreword in Robert McClory, *Turning Point. The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission*. New York 1995, xi.

3. Did her life illuminate an aspect of women's experience or provide a model for the future?<sup>21</sup>

Everyone who knew Rie will agree that this profile of the table companions fits her person and her work. The story of her life convincingly shows the important role she played and the contribution she made to the improvement of the situation of women throughout the world. The experience of women in a masculine church concerned her deeply and her fight for a more human church has encouraged many. Because of her, "the heritage that is our power" has become richer.

"All the institutions of our culture tell us – through words, deeds and, even worse, silence – that we are insignificant. But our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing that other women have been strong. To reclaim our past and insist that it become a part of human history is the task that lies before us, for the future r

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<sup>21</sup> Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 98.