

In a Concluding Note, Dr Buxton recalls some of the general principles of Mandari thought, notably the underlying order and predictable response—supported by a body of proof drawn from the careful observation of the real or supposed properties of matter at the level of practical experience. She recognises that Mandari religious categories are not linguistically distinguished from the natural, but argues that there are implicit distinctions in Mandari thinking about them. Despite their speculative bent of mind, the Mandari do not usually challenge their accepted boundaries, because they are concerned to revise on the basis of particular experience, rather than engage in generalised testing.

As I said at the beginning of this article, when I first read *Religion and Healing in Mandari*, it seemed to me somehow lacking in complete unity. It now seems to me to possess an exceptional unity, resulting in part at least from the author's refusal to force her material into some shape of her own choice. Thus, the shape which does emerge seems to be extremely true to Mandari reality. The anthropologist's 'last temptation, and the greatest treason' is to present the people studied through some projection of his or her own personality. The anthropologist's grace is to find a way of understanding through some common qualities of mind and heart. I think it was Dr Buxton's own balance, courage, and basic serenity that enabled her to find the same qualities among the Mandari.

Women and the Priesthood

by Eirene Willis

The subject of the ordination of women to the representative priesthood of the Church is often discussed in terms of objections and meeting objections. The quick exchange and the tension involved in differing considerations can often be helpful and constructive; but I have chosen simply to consider the idea of women priests in itself, in a positive way. One may very well agree with the Anglican bishop, Trevor Huddleston, that the theological arguments against the ordination of women 'simply don't hold water'; and one may also take the view of the novice master of an anglican monastery, that the argument of the twelve apostles all having been men is New Testament

fundamentalism; one may agree with both these and others who take a similar view, and yet prefer simply to think about a priesthood of men and women in and for itself.

One other point of introduction is this, that any open discussion on the matter, and any public consideration of it, should, to be safe, have the support and purification of private self-examination. For the issues involved touch us at levels deeper than our reason; and if discussion becomes highly charged emotionally, as it sometimes does, then it is fairly certain that the people concerned have not privately come to terms with their feelings; we need to discover by ourselves what we feel about the subject, not only what we think, and not only what we think we ought to feel. In this way we can both discover our motives and work out our reasons. Doubtless the two should converge, but they do so to some extent in a divided, not yet perfectly integrated, human nature. A person can have a case for or against the ordination of women which in itself is flawlessly reasoned but which covers a subconscious motive or feeling of very dubious quality. And so a developed capacity for self-examination, and the courage to exercise it with regard to the subject of women priests is surely a basic qualification for everyone who seeks the truth on the matter; and in a particularly pressing way is it a basic qualification for the people involved in making decisions in the Church. Examination of the issues must be supported and purified by self examination. The bombs that are currently close at hand can be safely handled only by those who know how first to defuse them; this bomb will be defused only if all of us concerned come to terms with our underlying emotive attitudes.

But now to consider the subject of women priests; they would be both women *priests* and *women* priests. As *women* priests they would exercise a priesthood that would be the same in nature as male priesthood but different in mode of exercise. For just as a male priest exercises his priesthood through what he is—a man—so also a woman priest would be a priest in and through her feminine nature, not in spite of it. She would be a *woman* priest, a spiritual mother, not a priest who unfortunately was also a woman. What it is in the feminine nature that would make it suitably receptive to the sacrament of Holy Orders, and suitably disposed to exercise the gift of priesthood, I hope will emerge in due course. For now, suffice it to say that women priests would be *women* priests.

But first, a few thoughts on them as women *priests*. What are some of the essential aspects of priesthood, and could women exercise them? (In fact they *do* exercise some of them in the Anglican Church; the deaconess preaches, teaches, administers the Chalice at Holy Communion, and does pastoral work.) The first aspect to be mentioned, surely, is being with God for the sake of other people, leading a life of reflection and prayer which is centred on Christ but which overflows onto other people both through intercession and through influence.

To live interiorly a borderland existence, opening onto God and onto people, onto the eternal and onto the temporal—spatial, onto Being itself and onto particular beings, to live such a borderland existence is essential to priesthood. A two-fold devotion is involved and this will mean tension; are women capable of living the borderland existence interiorly? Are they able to sustain the tension? That is one question we have to ask. I feel the answer to be 'yes', that some women could fulfill this requirement of being with God for other people.

Another aspect of priesthood is guarding and conveying truth. A priest must have an understanding of Christian doctrine, a cherishing of it, and an ability to convey it to people through personal conversation, through preaching, and through his attitudes to people, to events, and to new ideas. To use Meriol Trevor's phrase, priests must be both 'prophets and guardians'; they must guard the doctrine of the Church, but they need often to speak the new word, for situations and individual and cultural patterns change, and the Word of God needs to be spoken in new words; and it can, for that Word is Absolute, not cut and dried, and the Absolute can embrace, and come to terms with, every relativity, every shift in our ceaselessly shifting world. And so a second question we have to ask is: are women capable of being both 'prophets and guardians'?

One other aspect of priesthood I'll mention at this point is Offertory. In the Eucharist, the bread and wine offered on the altar symbolise the natural world and man's work upon it, they also symbolise man's own nature and achievements. All that is good is offered in order to be consecrated. All the people at the Eucharist make the Offertory, the priest is the one who articulates it in word and act at the altar. And in this way his work of Offertory at the altar is integrally related to the work of Offertory in his pastoral life; for there he fastens on the good things in people, and articulates them to God—not in word and act as at the altar, but in the silent movement God-wards in the stillness of recollection; he must collect up the good bits he finds in people—their desires for goodness, their generous impulses, their gropings for truth—these 'saintly bits' he must notice in conversation, must fasten on in his heart, and must articulate God-wards. Intercession and Offertory, both central to priesthood, are in this way closely related. Von Hügel wrote that the Feast of All Saints is not only of all saints, but of all the 'saintly bits' that have ever been; priesthood involves a sensitivity to these 'saintly bits' in people, an attitude that encourages their growth, and an *attrait* of Offertory, of articulating them God-wards. Is this sensitivity to be found in women, and are women capable of being Offertory orientated?

I have taken these features of priesthood; there are others; but these should suffice to indicate the sort of questions that are relevant to the subject of women *priests*. I feel the answer is 'yes, some women are capable', with regard to each of these features considered. But the

picture that emerges, as I see it, is not just 'women could be good priests—at least some women could—what a pity that the Church cuts down the number of possible vocations by half'. Nor is it only this: 'how sad, and how wrong it is, that women who want to exercise a full ministry can only exercise a partial one'. It is that, of course; but it is more: it is that the Church's ministerial priesthood is but partially representative when it is meant to be fully so. On the one hand, its function is to represent humanity before God, humanity in its fullness; it's not that a male priest *can't* represent women before God, it's that he does not do so *tangibly*. His tangible, obvious, concrete representation is male; for the female half of humanity to be represented tangibly, particularly, obviously and concretely, female priests, a complementarity within the representative priesthood—this is the picture that seems to emerge.

But on the other hand, the priesthood is representative of God to humanity; its function is to convey to people the attitudes of God and to embody for them, in some degree, the love of God. And we may very seriously ask whether this function is fulfilled, *can* be fulfilled, by an exclusively male priesthood. In the New Testament one can discern two strands of thought and feeling about the love of God; one is that the love of God desires perfection for us, demands perfection, spurs us on; the other is that His love embraces us as we are, that it is unconditional. In the first strand, God's love is our challenge, in the second it is our refuge; in the first God is in infinite demand, in the second He is first and final succour; in the first He loves us for doing good, for having faith in Christ, for loving Him, whereas in the second He loves us unconditionally. One thinks of the line of Kabir's poem:

'Thou art the sky, Thou art also the nest'

This is, of course, a Jungian theme, and Christopher Bryant, S.S.J.E., has written very helpfully on it. He indicates that the two strands of the challenging and the accepting loves correspond to paternal and maternal love, respectively—not exclusively so, of course; a mother makes demands and encourages effort, and a father accepts and forgives; but in general, Father Bryant maintains, the challenging love characterises the father, and the unconditional, all embracing love characterises the mother. Using the words in this sense, then, we can affirm that, according to the New Testament, God has a dual love, a paternal and a maternal love. We are not presuming to analyse the life within God Himself, but to distinguish two kinds of love, or two aspects of love, as they impinge on human beings when they are open to God. If people are to receive the love of God in its fullness, in its duality, and if it is the function of the priesthood to represent, to embody, the love of God to people, then it follows that both male and female priests, both spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers are needed. Again, it is not that male priests *fail*

to be forgiving and all accepting, necessarily or that women priests would be devoid of the challenging element. But women priests could more obviously, more tangibly, more predominantly, embody and convey the love that expects nothing, demands nothing, that simply accepts and affirms. That people should receive this unconditional love, should see it tangibly represented, is so important, that the question of women priests could, I think, be fruitfully thought about in that respect alone. It is often most distressing to listen to people, both inside and outside the Church, talking in such a way that it is quite clear which of the two strands they have grasped and which they have lost or never found: the Church has standards, the Church has conditions, the Church makes demands—that is clear in their minds, but it is all that is clear. It may be a wonderful thing that the Church is, to use the phrase, 'a school for sinners, not just a museum for saints', but it would be even more wonderful if it were a home, a nest, as well as a school. Of course in some places, at some times, and in certain degrees, it *has* been a home, it *has* been a nest; but one does not need a vast knowledge of ecclesiastical history to know that those places, times and degrees have been all too limited. The fact that the pastoral love of God has been far more emphasised—and still is, in the Anglican Church—than the maternal love of God, is not, surely, unrelated to the fact that the priesthood has been exclusively male. It seems to me that these two facts are essentially related. I am not meaning to make a negative point about male priests, but a positive point about women priests, that they could tangibly represent the maternal, unconditional love of God in a way that would complement the male priesthood. To be fully representative of God to humanity, and of humanity to God, a male *and* female priesthood would seem to be needed.

If we think to ourselves, 'women are weak and defenceless, they are sensitive and vulnerable; they could not be priests'—and certainly women are vulnerable—let us reconsider this theological point, that the central symbol of the Christian religion is a crucifix. There we see defencelessness at its extreme, and vulnerability at its deepest; and not only that, but, according to Johannine teaching, this reveals the nature of God's love. *God* is vulnerable. To quote Daniel Day Williams, 'God makes Himself vulnerable to receive into His being what the world does in its freedom'. He may *choose* to be vulnerable, but He still *is* so. Baker writes in 'The Foolishness of God', the orthodox doctrine of God's impassibility means that He is not acted upon without His willing it; but of course if He loves He *does* will it. He *does* will to be acted upon, to suffer, since love's primary characteristic is openness to the person or persons loved. John Drury makes a similar point with regard to God's dependence on people: 'Certainly this is, in good traditional theology, voluntary. He has chosen that it should be so. It is none the less irrevocable. . . .' The dependence of God, the

vulnerability of God—this element in the divine nature can actually be represented by particular forms of human defencelessness; the relative vulnerability of women priests would have a positive value. The weakness of God obviously arises from His strength; His perfect and perpetual capacity to receive into Himself what the world does in its freedom rests on a steadfastness of love which cannot be broken. The steadfastness, the purpose, the inner integrity of love—this is the *invulnerable* element in God, and it is represented in human beings, not in safe aloofness or comfortable impersonality, but in the undeflected purpose of charity that can underlie sensitivity and openness. The vulnerability of women priests would be, not a disadvantage, but a valuable element, in proportion to the invulnerability of their inner purpose of charity.

One final point: it could be said that these considerations point to the need for women's ministry in 'the priesthood of all women believers', and even in a specialised preaching and teaching ministry, but not in the ministry of sacraments. But this, I think, would be to introduce an internal division into the sacraments themselves, to divide absolution from confession, for example, or Eucharistic consecration from Eucharistic Offertory. For, as we saw earlier, there is a close connection between the silent, God-ward articulation of 'the saintly bits' found in pastoral work, and the spoken, acted articulation of them in the Eucharistic Offertory. The corporate offering is not a general offering, it consists of all the particular offerings; and the corporate offering on the altar is to be consecrated, that is its purpose. To separate the particulars of pastoral work from corporate liturgy, or liturgic offertory from consecration, is to introduce a division that fails to correspond with reality. Similarly, it is unrealistic to divide absolution from confession, or confession from the pastor's silent articulation God-wards of the shadows present in the people he talks with. These elements are deeply interconnected; pastoral work and the administration of sacraments form a unity. That is why the full ministerial priesthood is desired.