



algemene zaken:

DESCRIPTION OF THE TASK
OF THE WORKING 'TEAM'
'COOPERATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH'

The urgency of cooperation.

The desire for a true cooperation of men and women in the Church is based on the renewed reflection on the nature of the Church, Its starting-point is the conviction that all members of God's people, men and women, possess the same dignity and have the same mission.

'Hence in Christ and in the Church there is no inequality on account of race or people, rank or sex' (Constitution on the Church 'Lumen Gentium, nr.32).

At the Vatican Council it has often been stressed how inadequate women's position in the Catholic Church still is, and how much is lacking in the cooperation between men and women. But things will remain as they are, as long as the equality-in-Christ, professed in words, is not put into practice in the life of the Church. It is especially on the basic level of the man-woman relation that the Church will have to renew itself drastically. This is one of the most urgent tasks facing the Church in modern times. And at the same time it is one of the difficult tasks, as it touches the very roots of human existence. In most cases its importance and its urgency are still insufficiently acknowledged.

In a large measure the Church is suffering from the consequences of a disproportion in the development of the qualities of men and women, a disproportion which is of old standing and therefore taken for granted. Not only the external forms, but also the more fundamental structures of ecclesiastical life are onesidedly male in character. The community to which the gospel message of equal redemption and equal responsibility of men and women had been entrusted did not really arrange its life according to this message.

The unequal position of men and women in ecclesiastical life was borrowed rather from the existing cultural pattern, in which the woman was regarded as inferior to or in any case as subordinate to the man. The prevailing ideas of those days about the sexes were taken over and sanctioned in the course of the centuries. Thus a historically conditioned cultural pattern was considered to be a divine institution, which cannot and may not be changed.

The consequences of this patriarchal fixation of the Church are still exercising their influence. Neglect of the qualities given to women for the benefit of all has led to an impoverishment of the life of the Church. The activities of the Church were performed by men only. Woman's unequal ^{position} in the Church and, as a consequence of it, the lack of true cooperation does all kinds of harm:

- it does injustice to half of the faithful: their gifts for the edification of the Church are only partially developed.
- it is doing damage to the other half of the faithful, because to a deficient development of the female always corresponds an unfavourable development of the male. In a community the good of men and of women are so closely interrelated and interdependent that, if women are not allowed to develop their possibilities, this is not only harmful to women, but in an equal measure to men as well. Only by a mutually enriching cooperation both groups can fully develop and fulfil their tasks.
- it makes it difficult to experience the Church as a community of equal brothers and sisters, and obscures the real image of the Church. The traditional views and rules, which deny to women equal possibilities of using their gifts in the service of the Church, become more and more unacceptable, as they are experienced as a grievous discrimination.
- it obscures the Church' testimony to the world and diminishes the credibility of the christian message of man's dignity, as the discrepancy between theory and practice in the Church does not pass unobserved, the more so because at present it is outside the Church that we often see things done of which the Church should set the

example, viz. that men and women are collaborating as equal partners. The Church by her very nature should be a community in which the equality of all Christians is a living experience and takes visible shape. Only by a christian community in which men and women bear equal responsibilities in all vital activities of the Church can an inspiring influence be brought to bear upon the world. What we are aiming at is not the promotion of the interests of a special group in the Church (women), but the promotion of the good of the whole Church and the faithful accomplishment of her task. It is the task of the Church to give the redeeming power of the Gospel a visible shape in her own community life and thus to make it the haven of the world. The Church will only be able to accomplish her prophetic (viz. her critical and inspirational) task for the benefit of the world if the christian equality of man and woman is expressed in a consistent and permanent collaboration on all levels of ecclesiastical life.

What do we mean here by 'cooperation?' It is not enough that women receive equal rights (i.e. equal possibilities of service) and equal responsibilities in the Church. If no more would be done, this would only mean, that men and women live and work next to one another. What is needed is a cooperation of men and women in which by a common effort they are able to fulfil a common task. Nor do we mean an insertion of the female contribution into the existing forms of ecclesiastical life, because in that case the existing male forms will still be maintained as the legitimate basis. The present onesided male forms will have to be replaced by entirely new forms, into which male and female contributions will be integrated equal. Neither do we mean only a number of external changes in the distribution of tasks. In the Church a new mentality must develop in which the equality of man and woman has grown into an inner conviction. Then this equality will not be limited to a number of external renewals, because even if an equal number of women and men were occupied in various ecclesiastical functions and offices this fact by itself would not prove there is real cooperation.

Real cooperation is only achieved if men and women, both fully aware of their own oneness, would appreciate one another as indispensable cooperators in fulfilling the task of the Church. In this way an interplay develops of men and women, who, each in their own way, fulfil their task, knowing they are united in their common responsibility for the building-up of the Church.

The actual situation.

It is easy to see that the Catholic Church has not sufficiently followed up the inspirational message of the Gospel about the man-woman relation. In this matter she is lagging behind compared with certain sectors of society where, it would seem, the spirit of the Gospel has penetrated much deeper in this respect.

In connection with this we may point out the following phenomena:

1. The absence of women in all ecclesiastical orders, not only as a fact, but in virtue of juridical rules.
2. The lack of cooperation of men and women in the central government of the Church (Roman Curia; Vatican Council; Synod of Bishops), on all levels of government: preparation, decision and execution. (The fact that one or two women were among the observers of the Council, from the third session onwards, and that some are members of postconciliar councils is only exception that proves the rule).
3. Basically the same holds good for the government of ecclesiastical provinces, dioceses, deaneries, parishes and religious orders. Even if the part of women in advisory organisations has grown (or is growing) somewhat of late, still on the level of decision-making or execution there is not the slightest real cooperation of men and women as equal partners so far.
4. Although in the liturgical celebrations the role of the laity is gradually increasing (e.g. as a reader) yet woman's part in them is still too small.

5. The present juridical position of the female religious especially of cloistered nuns, and their absolute dependence on the Congregation of the Religious. Moreover this Congregation until recently (October 1967) consisted of men only.
6. The various discriminating stipulations contained in the present Code of Canon Law. A revision of the following canons is needed: canon 93, 98, 506, 709, 813, 968, 1967, 1262, 1264, 1327, 1380, 1979 2004. The commission for the revision of Canon Law has no women among its members.
7. The predominantly male (and celibatarian) view on sexuality, as it is expressed in traditional/^{theological} literature which is still in vogue in the greater part of the Church, even in official documents of the Pope and the Curia.
8. The survival of a fixed image of woman, which is becoming more and more obsolete in modern society (woman as 'the other one'; occupying a second place; neither being allowed nor wanting to bear responsibility in public life; kept in a state of tutelage; regulated to home and children; looked upon, when unmarried as trouble-some and dangerous.). These and similar stereotypes are often more difficult to eradicate within the Catholic Church than elsewhere.

The task of the working-team.

Now that the Church desires to renew herself, it is of fundamental and primary importance that in all sections of the Church new relations be established giving men and women equal responsibilities in the life and activity of the Church. In order to reach this goal it is not sufficient if only some incidental attention, without real engagement, is paid to the existing deficiencies in the cooperation of men and women. Moreover the endeavours made up till now in order to promote this development were not sufficiently coordinated to be effective and to overcome the existing situation. The increase of cooperation between men and women must be promoted purposefully and systematically. But a systematic approach is only

possible if an organisation is called into being to which the promotion of this development is entrusted. That is why the general committee of the St. Willibrord Society on November 3, 1967, has taken the initiative in setting up a working-team for 'Cooperation of men and women in the Church' which has as its goal the realisation and promotion of the collaboration of men and women as really equal partners, who bear equal responsibilities in all sectors of ecclesiastical life, in accordance with the message of the Gospel, and attuned to the gradually evolving pattern of behaviour in society. The name and the aims of this working-team have also been inspired by the 'Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society' of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

The working-team carries out its activities within the Catholic Church. On the other hand it will be ecumenically orientated as well. As in the various Churches there exist similar problems regarding the cooperation of men and women it seems advisable that they join their endeavours. In common studies and discussions, in an exchange of experiences and in common regulations for renewal they can assist one another. That is why the working-team will seek cooperation with kindred groups or authorities in other Churches. It will also promote the cooperation of these catholic and protestant authorities in an inter-church committee. Now that the Council of Churches in the Netherlands is set up, (of which the Roman-Catholic Church is a member) this inter-church committee may become one of the subdivisions of this Council of Churches.

But even in that case the working-team will keep a certain amount of independence in order to be able to work effectively within the catholic community and to act as a liaison-group.

The task of the working-team includes the following activities:

1. Ecumenical cooperation.

The team will cooperate with similar groups or authorities in other Churches and try to promote, together with them, the formation of an inter-church committee, which in due time may become a subdivision of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands.

2. Study

The team will try to promote the study of questions (in their various theological and non-theological aspects) connected with the defective collaboration of men and women. For more specific problems such as the question of the admission of women to holy orders the help of experts may be asked.

3. Making an Inventory

The team will try to describe the actual situation: it will indicate the cases of insufficient cooperation between men and women and those of adequate cooperation that have been realised. It will collect statistical information, e.g. how many women exercise a function in the Church and what kind of function they are holding. These statistics should be compared with those of other Churches.

Also, a study should be made of how many catholic women are holding a function in public life. These numbers should be compared with the number of women from other Churches and of women who do not belong to any Church, holding public functions.

4. Influencing public opinion.

The team will try to make priests and layman aware of the problematic aspects of the existing situation and keep them informed, about the new insights concerning man and woman, which have been developed by modern science. It will offer them information, lists of books and topics for discussion. It will place at their disposal a list of names of lectures on various topics, set up a library of relevant literature for those interested and prepare public opinion in the Church for the new situation, which will develop when women receive an equal place in the Church.

5. Education

The team will work to ensure that in schools a correct view is taught and a right attitude given to children and adolescents. Especially it will exercise its influence in those institutes where new teachers are being trained.

6. Adult-education

It will work to see that more attention is given to this topic in the programs of all centres for adult-education. If possible it will prepare a 'course' for all those who are engaged in education.

7. Conferences and publications.

It will organise symposiums (weekends, conferences etc.) on the cooperation of men and women. It will promote the publication of studies on this topic (e.g. a prospective study of the man-woman relation)

8. Critical task

Wherever cooperation is lacking it will draw attention to this and point out concrete possibilities of cooperation. Wherever cases of discrimination against women are observed, these will be criticised.

9. Consultative task

It will advise ecclesiastical authorities, persons and groups, whenever this is deemed advisable.

10. Cooperation and coordination.

It will keep in touch and cooperate with other catholic and non-catholic bodies in the netherlands and abroad so that the various activities may be coordinated.

The Working-team has been set up, in the first instance, within the framework of the St. Willibrord Society and is also related to the 'Orientatie en Communicatie Centrum De Horstink'. but within this framework it has a certain amount of independence as regards its activities. Its secretariate is on the premises of the St. Willibrord Vereniging. (per 1 october: Kerk en Wereld, De Horst 1, Driebergen tel. 03438 - 2206.)