

Cartigny, October 25-29

W.E.L.G. - meeting

A few remarks on the different points of the
Agenda for the Cartigny meeting

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1. Résumé on "Women in the Church" - R. Goldie

I appreciate very much the synthetical approach to the different forms of service in the Church. They cover a wide spectrum of activities and life-styles. However, I would like to see the phenomenological one. What I mean is this: in which way can we describe the life of the church? Using the trilogy of Vatican II documents "prophecy, priesthood, royalty"? They don't seem to convey "categories" of our time. Should we use, then, the elements described by the WCC and to which Fr. Congar subscribes, adding another one, namely, should we use "witness, fellowship, mission (service) and worship"? But these categories, being existential do overlap. What then? Is there another comprehensive trilogy in the so important ecumenical "set" of "unity, renewal, mission"? In other words, the notes that define the Church in the "Creed - Unam, Sanctam, Catholicam, Apostolicam - are they able to give a frame work?

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Personally, it seems to me that "witness, fellowship, service, and worship" are the most suitable for the description of women's participation in the life of the Church.

The reason why I stress the need for this framework is the fact that we need a basis which is co-extensive to the whole life of the Church in its communal reality. A simple listing of different "rôles" is not enough. Moreover, (though such is not the intention!) it places the whole question in terms of the doing. No doubt that women are doing a lot in the churches and through the churches, but the main problem at stake is, to my mind, how they situate themselves, as human persons, in the stream of Church's life.

If we would agree with such a framework, the nine points made in Rosemary's résumé would be, somehow, rewritten in a different context. To give some examples:

Witness - This covers all the aspects of life in which women bring the witness of their baptism. It does suppose that the meaning of being women would be further clarified, so as to free women from the unrewarding task of doing the same job as men only at one octave higher! ... More seriously, it does suppose that there is a way of living out Christianity which is proper to women and which can be lived only by them. It is primarily through their mode of being in the world as Christian women that women make up the Church and build it. (Here I will include point 1 of Rosemary's résumé)

Communion or Fellowship - This covers all forms through which women share in the fellowship of the People of God. As this fellowship is not a levelling down of different gifts, women can bring to the communion their carisma as women, so that the interaction among sexes (as well as among generations or different types of occupation) may bring more richness to the whole community (Here I include points 2,3, may be 7 and 8 of Rosemary's résumé)

Service - Briefly this covers not only the service within the Church but the service of the great needs of mankind in the world. There is a special relevancy in this point as the service of Christian women should bring about values and attitudes much needed in the world today. (I would include here point 4, 5 of Rosemary's résumé)

Worship - This covers the forms of ritual worship as well as other new forms which are developing very much. (I would include here points 6 and 9 of Rosemary's résumé)

In this context, it seems to me that the participation of women in the "decision-making" process of the Church (in its "power", if you want) is bound to the question of fellowship, and is one among many others. To my mind, it would be a great impoverishment in the women's contribution to the life of the Church to envisage it only from the angle of "power".

Now, let me try to come to answer Rosemary's two questions:

- It would be good if the W.E.L.G. would prepare a documentation however, the literature in this field being overwhelming. I wonder about the practical feasibility of such an idea if the W.E.L.G. keeps its present form;
- In fact, the answer to the first question is in the second question! I consider vital for the question of "women in the Church" to be dealt with as a true research topic to have a research group. I would like to plead for a small core group with training in research to start this work. I don't see the need for the group to include men and women! I agree with the Lib's conviction that we are at the stage in which, pragmatically, it is better to work things out among women. No need to say that I agree 100% with the ecumenical character of such a group.

It seems to me that a research group, if we want it to be an operative one, couldn't be build only on the spare-time and good-will of some persons. It ought to be a proper research group with the tools inherent to that.

The urgency of such a group can only be pointed out in terms of the ability of the Church to read the "signs of the times" and to answer to them in an adequate way.

2. Paper on "Discrimination against Women" - Marga Bührig

My congratulations for this excellent essay! Its greatest merit is, to my mind, the attempt to interrelate the situation within

the Church and the situation in the world at large.

I would like to comment on the different sections and will come back then to the over-all perspective.

I. "Women" in documents of the WCC - I appreciated very much the survey (especially useful for those who had not followed in detail the work done by the WCC) but I wished that this section will be complemented by an appraisal of the grass-root situation. It is not easy to know from here how the women of the Churches situate themselves in regard to the Church as a whole. Somehow, this part remains only within the boundaries of the "establishment" ..

II. Declaration of Human Rights and its consequences. The comments made here are very enlightening. I would like to add a few points.

The questions related to women have been dealt with regularly in the UN by the "Commission on the Status of Women". It is true that this Commission has dealt for a very long time with "the rights of women" - voting right, minimum age for marriage, nationality of the married women, etc., etc.

It is important to note that, during the 60's the Commission went beyond this legal phase in an attempt to establish a unified UN programme for the advancement of women. In 65, the Commission called the attention of the world public opinion for the importance of women's contribution to national development, and, in this context, for the need to improve the status of women. This had led to two basic documents used in the 1970 meeting of the Commission: "unified program for the advancement of women" and "participation of women in the economic and social development of their countries". The current accent of the Commission is, thus, in the urgency for women's participation in national development (since 65, many countries established National Commissions of Women with that purpose). It is the conviction of the Commission that the stress on such a participation will lead to the elimination of discrimination against women. This explains why the Commission reorganised its various fields in the framework of the minimal targets to be attained during the second Development Decade.

While putting this evolution together with the emerging concept operative in UNESCO of "cultural policy", it can be said that these international organs are going away from the pleading of rights towards an affirmation of full participation. In other terms, women cease to be the "object" - of justice, of protection - to become the "subject" - of culture, of decision-making, of history-planning.

This has a tremendous repercussion in the way we look at the Church. To keep speaking of and fighting for rights is not anymore in pace with the "secular" instances, it seems to me. The lesson to be taken from the evolution of the Commission on the Status of Women is to move towards the concept of women as subjects, participating fully in the life of society and the Church and, because they participate, "rights" will come as a by-product.

III. Towards a definition of discrimination. This chapter is very well conceived and different elements are interwoven in a very interesting way. There are two elements here which can only be stressed.

One is the affirmation of the basic fact of motherhood. It seems to me that, from an anthropological point of view, we cannot go away from that fact. Of course, I understand here motherhood as a relational type - to things, to persons, to the world. Any attempt to overcome discrimination cannot overlook this element.

The other aspect which I value very much in this part is the very concept of discrimination, with the assumption that "an order of preference of certain relevant areas of behaviour is imposed on certain people although it is really not their own." Well, if we follow this line through we come to the conclusion that the best way to overcome discrimination is to overthrow the "order of preference" or, in other words, it is for women to find new modes of behaviour which will spring forth from their own being and not from the order imposed to them.

IV. Instances of practical discrimination. This is a very interesting chapter. I would stress, however, one sentence on pg. 14, namely "we may well ask whether this is indeed a case of discrimination" (in relation to scientific careers in Sweden). It seems to me that there is an element of prestige linked with scientific or technical careers in affluent society that would, in places where there is no discrimination, be an appeal for women as well as for men. Maybe the reasons for women to follow other type of careers have to be found else where than in discrimination.

V. Contribution of Churches to overcoming discrimination. May be it is in this section that I will stress the over-all perspective. We are led here to recognize the need "to alter power structures". This does not seem the fundamental question. Power is an element of authority, always linked with responsibility. Responsibility, in its turn, flows from participation to the best of one's own capacity. It is my conviction that the participation of women, as such and not imitating men, in the life of the Church is linked with the responsibility they may carry. They will have the authority needed to accomplish their responsibility. I know that in many instances, certain categories, of people in the Churches, namely the priests, are not willing to accept that others have the authority inherent to the responsibility they are exercising. However, it seems to me that it is at that level that whatever discrimination may exist has to be abolished.

The most important task for women and women's groups is to find out their own identity, to get independent from the "colonisation" of a men's world ... In other words, it is to find out which charisma are they filled with and to translate those charisms into ministries in the Church for the service of everyone and the world.

3. "Women and Peace"

The minutes from the meeting of June 19th in Vienna between members of WELG and SODEPAX don't convey very clearly to me the goals set for this endeavour. It does seem to me, however, that there are several contradictions in the plans made so far, e.g. 6 and 7 somehow don't go together, do they?, and this kind of plan presumes the existence of the WELG, doesn't it?

4. Plans for the Future

The last question is indeed a puzzle for me - and, I imagine, for everybody involved.

If the WELG is going to finish its exploratory phase in 1972, it is important to try to answer the questions raised earlier during other meetings. I would like to give my suggestions regarding the questions raised by the Joint Working Group and sent to the WELG members by its co-chairmen.

a. "indication of questions requiring further study" - There are, to my mind, some basic questions, which still need adequate treatment:

- anthropological study concerning the two "hypotheses" of the human being;
- study of the relation between the spirit and the natural aptitudes or modes of being with particular stress on woman;
- study of the concept of ministry, understood as service and not as ordained ministry;
- survey of the existing groups and the way in which they have integrated the participation of women in the Churches;

b. fields of activities in which collaboration might be serviceable.

All the projects on the way in the WELG seem to fit into here. May I suggest a further field: survey of the involvement of Christ-Christian women in technological sectors of social life and in politics. This could be done through a world conference. The interest is in the fact that both the technological world and the political world represent "frontier-situations" for women.

3. organisational elements desirable

It would seem to me a much more profitable enterprise if we could have two groups:

1. a group which would capitalize in the tremendous capacity for getting things on their way of several Christian women (some members of WELG being certainly among them!) in order to launch activities like a world conference of women on peace, a world inquiry on the image of women, etc.

2. a small group doing research aimed at coming to a global view about women's participation in the life of the Church. This small group would need to work in a nearly professional basis, with a major documentation center either in Rome or in Geneva.