



EXECUTIVE COUNCIL of the EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Memo to : Ad Hoc Committee on Lay Ministries
From : Wilber Katz
Date : April 26, 1969
Subject : Lay Participation vs. Clergy Domination, and Vice Versa

At its first meeting the committee came to see that the problem of "integrating women into the total life, planning, and work of the Church" is not merely -- or primarily -- one of legal or organizational structures. Nor is it a problem related only to women. The problem of promoting the full participation of women -- of making their abilities effectively available in the Church -- is but one aspect of the problem of promoting full participation by all the people, male and female, young and old, black and white, ordained and unordained.

Behind the structures and institutions which block full participation are tendencies and habits which are pervasive and deeply rooted. This memorandum sketches a diagnosis of the nature and roots of these obstacles. It reflects a belief that wider participation in the life of the Church requires wider understanding of these roots. Without such understanding, it is unlikely that even the wisest organizational changes will bring about a release within the Church of the creative capacities of its women -- or its men.

This diagnosis starts with two facts, the first being the enormous differences in the talents and abilities of individual churchmen, differences which determine the ways in which they might make the greatest contribution in the life and work of the Church. The second fact is our want of adequate knowledge of our own capacities and limitations and those of our fellows, and our uncertainty concerning the work which God has prepared for us and them to walk in. These two facts are seldom fully faced and trustingly accepted as inherent in the human situation. Our tendency is to try to protect ourselves from these painful uncertainties and possibilities of failure.

Our self-protective reaction patterns (whether conscious or unconscious) are of two kinds. In some of us the pattern

is assertive; some of us take a more or less aggressive role, seeming to claim greater knowledge, certainty, and abilities than we have. In others the pattern is withdrawing; some of us are usually passive, seeming to disclaim and refuse to use some of the knowledge and talents which we have. It is unfortunate, furthermore, that we reinforce each other in these defensive reactions. Those who dominate make active participation more difficult for the hesitant; and those who are hesitant and diffident make it almost necessary for the dominating to dominate.

One of the tricks we all use, whether our personal defense mechanisms are assertive or withdrawing, is to consider other people not as individuals but as members of a class: "the women," "the clergy," "the laity." This simplifies our problem of relating to them, relieving us of the necessity of learning about their individual abilities and limitations and about the ways in which we might best work with them. Too often we seem to assign to others a stereotyped role - and consign ourselves to a stereotyped relation to them.

Our stereotypes in relation to leadership are particularly debilitating in the life of the Church. One of these, of course, is the notion that men should have initiative and control in parish finances; that the role of women should be separate and auxiliary. Another is the view that the rector should provide the ideas and direction for the parish program; that it is inappropriate for a layman to take in his parish the kind of initiative and leadership which he exercises in his secular employment. This view may be called "clericalist", using the term "clericalism" for the prejudice which draws lines in terms of ordination on matters other than sacramental or preaching ministry.

It is sometimes thought that clericalism is a prejudice peculiar to the clergy. To be sure, not all clergymen are exempt from it, but clericalism is often a prejudice of laymen, for it is often their rationalization for shunning responsible participation. A clergyman is often forced by such clericalism into a broadly dominating role for which he may not be temperamentally qualified. And lay clericalism often shows itself as anti-clericalism; for it is a form of clericalism to assume

that ordination, which certifies qualification for sacramental ministry, also certifies disqualification for dealing with problems of the secular world.

But it is not merely role stereotypes for clergy and laity which frustrate their full contribution to the life of the Church. General personal tendencies of domination and withdrawal are everywhere in evidence. And there is no evidence that the frequency distribution of the two reaction patterns is different among the clergy and the laity. The assumption that clergymen typically dominate is itself an example of clericalist prejudice.

At the beginning of this memorandum hope was expressed that wider understanding of the roots of these tendencies might bring amelioration and might pave the way for wider participation in the life and work of the Church. Such understanding, however, means self-understanding - the ability to detect symptoms of self-protectiveness in our own habits and reactions. To achieve such self-understanding is not primarily an intellectual achievement. It is much easier to recognize defensiveness in other people. But it is possible for this recognition to be colored with compassion and to be coupled with recognition of our kinship with them. Such miraculous education is everywhere possible through the grace of God; we should not make it more difficult for Him to accomplish in the fellowship of the Church.