

An Evening with Anne Soupa
Zoom Session with
We Are Church Ireland
23 November 2020

Text of Anne's Address

I am very happy to spend this evening with you, and I ask your indulgence for my weakness in English.

Certainly, I took an unusual step when I announced my candidacy for the Bishopric of Lyon, on May 23rd. Unusual in two respects: On the one hand, in the Roman Catholic Church, bishops do not emerge from a public candidacy, but are appointed in Rome according to a secret procedure. On the other hand, it is considered impossible for a woman to be at the head of a diocese and to lead it. So, I knew very well that no one would come to pick me up. I had to do it with my own conscience and energy.

As a girl of my time, used to equality, I was enthusiastic about being a candidate. Without any fear, only a kind of jubilation to see my picture, a woman's picture, near the word "bishop".

But I have been very criticized, or very supported. Then I had discovered, with sadness, in my person herself, the extent of the gap between church and society. According to me, it's too deep to be filled. The schism is here, very close to us.

In the Catholic Church, the bishops see themselves as the successors of the apostles. OK. But I want to ask an unusual but important question: how do they know that they are the only ones? Are we to pretend that they captured the heritage of the apostles for their own benefit? It's the same in a family. The first born isn't the only heir. In the past, and still in many patriarchal cultures, the first born – especially sons – appropriated everyone's heritage. In several religious foundations, we see that inheritance is also commandeered. The inheritance of Gospel is not only in the hierarchical church even if she denies it.

. The designation of the Twelve male Apostles is another form of appropriation. It fails to show that all are called to serve Christ through responsible ministries, and not only as a small circle of happy friends. Twelve are the tribes of Israël. Asking for the twelve tribes, means calling all the people.

But the hierarchical Church forgets that, originally in the 2nd century, bishops were not priests. The Priest in the modern sense, the sacerdotal one, the priest who celebrates the mass, appears in 250 af. JC. And the first bishops, Clement of Rome, or Ignace of Antiocha appear in 100 after JC. During 150 years bishops were common lay people. So I want to say high and loud that my candidacy is secular. I don't want to be priest, I don't need it, and I want to show that it's time to entrust the

church at lay people. The priesthood is of another age; she is unsuitable for modernity. At issue: exclusionary masculinity, celibacy, lifelong vows, and especially clericalism, which is an abuse of power. Admit women, married men, you don't restore the priesthood.

This idea, the irremediable wear and tear of the priesthood and promotion of the laity, was very difficult to admit by my interlocutors.

My candidacy attracted a lot of media attention. But from the bishops and nuncio, I received no response. The seven subsequent candidates who followed my example were invited to meet the apostolic nuncio, in October, but, bafflingly, I was left standing outside.

The objections that I heard after my candidacy were numerous.

The most frequent one is that it was an error to offer my candidacy. I answered simply that nobody would put me on the nuncio's list, for obvious reasons. Everybody knows that. But that's a convenient way to be blind to the real issue.

One of the major objections, offered with seriousness and a lot of compunction, is that my candidacy feeds clericalism. That is to say that no woman can overcome her subordination since all functions in the church are clericals.

So, wait and see...

In truth, I see this as a way to do nothing.

And there were other objections and excuses, such as: "the situation of women must change. But it will take several years, may be two or three more generations". From my perspective that's a way to postpone what is necessary and to confuse the urgency of the moment like a Greek calendar.

It is very instructive to observe all the arguments of denial. Few arguments can resist an idea whose time has arrived. I haven't found anyone who has convinced me otherwise. But the main argument – the actual truth - "women are not allowed" stays hidden because it's yet inaudible in the public discourse.

It remains that my gesture is one of disobedience characterized with regard to the rights of the Church. Not only does canon 375 of the Code of Canon Law require that bishops be priests, but canons 233 and 235 consider without evidence that only men can be priests.

The formal prohibition for women, which is not in the code, was enacted in two papal documents, of various importance.

The first one is *Inter insigniores*, Declaration of the sacred congregation for the doctrine of the faith, at the time of Pope Paul VI, who said in 1974 that the subject is not yet sufficiently worked out and, as it is, we cannot open ordination to women.

The second one is more restrictive. In *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, an apostolic letter from

Pope John Paul II in 1995, he said that his position cannot be reformed.

And further, a “doctrinal note” of 1998: *At tuendam fidem* stated it is forbidden to speak of the ordination of women. That explains why bishops are cautious on the subject. Those who do talk about it, like Cardinal Hollerich in Luxembourg, are courageous.

The hierarchical church, by demanding absolute obedience, denies the place of conscience and obstructs the freedom of the children of God. And to obtain obedience, they exploit with the toxic emotion of guilt-tripping. There is a lot to do to free Roman Catholic people, men and women, from this culpability!

And if you challenge hierarchical power, you can be excommunicated. Excommunication is a serious act, because Christ's first concern was to fight exclusion, much more than poverty. I regret that the hierarchical church forgot this key tenet of Christ, by excluding women, divorced and remarried couples, and homosexuals.

The ban on women from being a priest, deacon, a bishop, a pope, is an abuse of power. It is against this abuse of power that I rose. My greatest hope is that women, everywhere, stand up and make their voices heard also.

Everybody knows that disobedience can be caused by a compelling motive. And here, you can find in my disobedience the Gospel which never discriminates against women. All of the Gospel of Christ is feminist. I shall try to follow it. For me it's enough.

A new archbishop in Lyon had been named and will assume his office on December 20th. A very classic one. But I am sure that, with my candidacy, the cause of women has progressed. In July, on the feast of Mary of Magdala, in Paris, seven women offered their candidacy for forbidden functions. It must be the same in Ireland, in England, in Germany, in Italy and throughout the Universal Church. That's my greatest hope.