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WHAT HAPPENED TO "SOLA SCRIPTURA"? HOW THE BIBLE WAS USED IN THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN PRIEST AND BISHOPS IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Abstract

In the article Author examines the traditional meaning of the formula sola Scriptura in the Anglican Church in the epoch of Reformation and confronts it with now-a-days use of the Bible in the process of decision-making in the matter of Church life and doctrine. The sample of this process is the adoption of women's priestly and episcopal ordination in the Anglican Communion and especially in the Church of England.

Christian denominations being reciprocally connected, the decisions taken in one confession do matter for the rest of the Christendom. This is proved by the substantial change introduced in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue by the unilateral decisions of Anglicans to ordain women. The questioned decisions were taken however on the improper hermeneutics of biblical texts and on the presuppositions leading to dangerous intellectual short-cut. Thus the line of argumentation issued by Anglicans from the Bible omits what the Roman Catholic really stands for. The equal dignity of men and women proved by the biblical texts has never been denied by the Catholics. The argument important for the Catholics that the Church cannot change the will of Christ towards ordination has been simply by-passed by moving this subject from divine to human law.

Key words: women's ordination, women bishops, Anglicanism, Anglican Communion, ecumenical dialogue.

The history of divisions in the Christendom is nearly as long as Christianity itself. During the centuries however the causes for divisions were in majority of doctrinal nature and in minority of political one. The 12th century brought into light new causes of division being of doctrinal and moral nature or the combination of both. The line of division were from then on drawn not only between the traditional Churches and Church Communities but even inside

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a particular ecclesial body, as shows the case of some of Anglican and protestant Churches. The introduction of new inventions into the Church life used to be justified by the reinterpretation of biblical texts which proved to be contrary to the hitherto existing Church tradition. This is the case of the use of the Bible in the fight for ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy.

This was also the case in the womb of the Anglican Communion, where new inventions on the doctrinal field coincided later with those of moral nature. The first controversies arose around the decisions taken since 1972 by consecutive Anglican Provinces to ordain women to the priesthood. This act raised the wave of individual conversions—mainly towards the Roman Catholic Church—by Anglicans attached to the traditional and biblical teaching. The same was provoked by the next step taken in many of 38 Anglican Provinces to ordain women to the episcopacy. These decisions caused an important doctrinal controversy in the womb of the Anglican Communion and between the Anglicans on one side and Roman Catholics together with the Orthodox on the other side. Controversial was the change to the explicit will of Christ who appointed only men as his Apostles.

I. "SOLA SCRIPTURA" OR FREE USE OF THE BIBLE

The famous rule of the 16th century Reformation, the *sola Scriptura*, for nearly fifth centuries provided to the societies formed by protestant Churches the solid base on which the doctrinal teaching could be formulated. One of the principles of the Reformation was to underline the unique authority of the Scriptures in transmission of God's Revelation.¹ In Anglicanism the principle *sola Scriptura* (as one of the *Articles of Religion*) took the form of so called 'Doctrine of the *necessaria*', pointing that all things necessary for salvation can be found in the Bible.²

¹ This principal role of the Scriptures describes B. Lambert (*Ecumenism: Theology and History*. London 1967 p. 26): "The primacy of the Word of God in Protestantism is a fact, a climate, a dogma. It belongs to the whole Protestant tradition, right from its manifold origins. It holds the title role in every denomination, without exception. It is a pre-requisite to their activity, their thought, their life. It is the measure, the norm, the regulating principle of Protestant orthodoxy. It has an equal authority over official and individual thought. It is the inspiration for a way of life and for the organization of human life." See also: *Anglicanism and the Bible*. Ed. F.A. Borsch. Wilton 1984.

² Article VI (*Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation*): "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is read therein, nor may be proved

Being the absolute norm of faith and morals—norma normans non normata—the Holy Scripture could not be perverted in its fundamental meaning. In the 20^{th} century however even this rule has been broken in favour of free, that means any interpretation of biblical teaching. New conclusions could then be derived from the biblical text—all for adjusting the reading of biblical message to the new types of deeds and behaviour. This introducing of new conclusions issued from the Bible shows the new hermeneutical approach where the Bible serves for justification of so called "modern developments" in the societies and no more for indicating the right line of belief and behaviour.

The protagonists of women's ordination searched in the Bible its justification, besides all the arsenal of the arguments of sociological nature. Such use of the biblical text points on the relativisation of biblical teaching and subsequently of morals. This inevitably must and does constitute the new lines of division between the Churches and inside the ecclesial bodies.

II. DECISION-MAKING REGARDLESS OF THE OTHERS

To begin with the Edinburgh conference of 1910, through the bilateral and multilateral dialogues between the Churches and the work of the WCC we have in today's world a great network of ecumenical encounters and dialogues. All theses dialogues are—of their nature—aimed to approach and then to reach the visible unity of one Church of Christ. In the same time we can notice how this legitimated goal often discords with the process of inner decision-making which proves to be totally regardless of the partners

thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." Quotation after *The Book of Common Prayer*. London 1844. Cf. J.W.C. W an d. *What the Church of England Stands for: A Guide to its Authority in the Twentieth Century*. London 1951 p. 35. G.D. Yarnold (*By What Authority? Studies in the Relations of Scripture, Church, and Ministry*. London 1964 pp. 24-25) points on the basic statements contained in the VIth Article of Religion: "(1) God is the ultimate source of all authority. (2) The scriptures contain the Word of God to man. (3) The books of scripture were written under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. (4) Their inspiration was recognized by the Church, under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit; and so the Canon of scripture was fixed. (5) The Church lives under the authority of scripture, which is the final arbiter in all matters of faith and morals." See also: A. de Mendieta. *Rome and Canterbury. A Biblical and Free Catholicism*. London 1982² pp. 39-41.

in the ecumenical dialogues. If we consider that we are—as the Christian Churches—in "imperfect, though existing communion"³ with each other, nothing that happens in one Church is meaningless for another. Decisions made by one ecclesial body interact with the rest of the Christendom. No one now can exist as en isolated island. Yet, with bitterness we can observe, how especially the Churches originated in the 16^{th} century Reformation consider themselves entitled to introduce new theological and moral rules non conform with the tradition of the Church and regardless of the rest of the Christendom.⁴

A great murmur spread all around the ecumenical world after the publication of Pope Benedict's apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus*.⁵ The Pope and the Roman Catholic Church were so easily accused of antiecumenical attitude, even of the comeback of unionism. In the same time almost no one seemed to notice, that the provinces of the Anglican Communion—similarly to many protestant Churches—have introduced unilaterally the changes in the Church life contrary to the oldest common tradition, upheld by the Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Theses Churches consider themselves to have the right to do this (often even in voting by the simple majority, even in doctrinal matters) and do not accept any critics of being antiecumenical in their deeds. Sometimes their leaders—as did Katharine Jefferts

³ To use the expression of blessed pope John Paul II from his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (*Encyclical letter «Ut unum sint» of the Holy Father, John Paul II on commitment to ecumenism.* Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1995) 11, 45, 84, 96.

⁴ On the reciprocal impact on the Church life of the decision taken unilaterally pointed Cardinal Walter Kasper (*Mission of Bishops in the Mystery of the Church: reflections on the question of ordaining women to Episcopal office in the Church of England. An address given to the Church of England Bishops' Meeting, 5 June 2006.* http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/ articles.php/1485/cardinals-address-on-women-bishops-a-clear-and-helpful-contribution-archbishop [access on 5th Jan. 2013] pt. III) speaking about possible introducing of episcopal women's ordination in the Anglican Communion: "When such a situation becomes a reality, it is not a purely inner-Anglican matter, but also has consequences for the ecumenical relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church. We had invested great hopes and expectations in the Catholic-Anglican dialogue. (...) But then the growing practice of the ordination of women to priesthood led to an appreciable cooling-off. A resolution in favour of the ordination of women to the episcopate within the Church of England would most certainly lower the temperature once more; in terms of the possible recognition of Anglican Orders, it would lead not only to a short-lived cold, but to a serious and long-lasting chill."

⁵ Benedict XVI. Apostolic Constitution «Anglicanorum coetibus» Providing for Personal Ordinariates for Anglicans Entering into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. Internet version: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_ben-xvi apc 20091104 anglicanorum-coetibus_en.html [access on 5th Jan. 2013].

Schori, the primate of ECUSA⁶—they refer to the leading by Holy Spirit. Can we not ask, if the Holy Spirit may be the spirit of division? Can He prompt one part of Christianity against another one? Surely not! What kind of spirit then do the ideas dividing the Churches come from?

III. WAS THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE ON EPISCOPAL MINISTRY VAIN?

The issue of the episcopal ministry was one of the most important questions discussed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). This ministry of oversight and pastoral care— $episcop\bar{e}$ —has been retained within the structure of the Catholic Church as well as in the Anglican Communion.

In the documents of ARCIC the *episcopē* of ordained ministers has been described as a special charisma of the Spirit given for the building of the Church to those who—by ordination—receive authority of the apostolic teaching, presiding at the Eucharist and prayer.⁷ The episcopate itself is given to the Church by God's will and the ministerial authority of bishops is closely connected with and inseparable from the hierarchical structure of the Church.⁸ For the preserving of the continuity and unity of the Church the apostolic succession should be guaranteed in the ordination of each bishop.⁹ Bishops are responsible for the preserving and promoting the integrity of the

⁶ ECUSA — Episcopal Church in the United States of America, constituting one of 38 independent Anglican provinces.

⁷ Authority in the Church. A Statement on the Question of Authority, its Nature, Exercise and Implications Agreed by the Anglican—Roman Catholic International Commission. London 1976 [further: Venice Statement] pt. 5.

⁸ "The ministry [is] exercised by the bishop, and by ordained persons under the bishop's care, as they proclaim the Word, minister the sacraments, and take their part in administering discipline for the common good." *Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.* London 1999 pt. 30.

⁹ "[Bishops], because they are representative of their Churches in fidelity to the teaching and mission of the apostles and are members of the episcopal college, their participation also ensures the historical continuity of this church with the apostolic church and of its bishop with the original apostolic ministry. The communion of the churches in mission, faith, and holiness, through time and space, is thus symbolized and maintained in the bishop. Here are comprised the essential features of what is meant in our two traditions by ordination in the apostolic succession." *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission: The Agreed Statements: Eucharistic Doctrine 1971, Ministry and Ordination 1973*. London 1973 pt. 16.

koinonia of the Church and are in their communities the focus of unity. A bishop—generally overseeing the community—can require from the faithful the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in the life of the community.¹⁰

Considering this, the far-reaching consensus in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue can be assumed. When the next step to the visible unity could possibly mean the re-examining of the Anglican orders, the decision made by the Anglican Communion about the women's ordination to the priesthood introduced a real obstacle to the continuation of the dialogue on this matter. After the decisions taken in the Anglican provinces about the episcopal women's ordination, the way to re-establishing of unity seems to be heavily blocked. Cardinal Walter Kasper, former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity commented on this decision in his speech to the Church of England House of Bishops. Cardinal warned against taking further steps in the Church of England march towards women's episcopal ordination: "Because the episcopal office is a ministry of unity, the decision you face would immediately impact on the question of the unity of the Church and with it the goal of ecumenical dialogue. It would be a decision against the common goal we have until now pursued in our dialogue: full ecclesial communion, which cannot exist without full communion in the episcopal office. (...) The quality of the dialogue would be altered by such a decision. Ecumenical dialogue in the true sense of the word has as its goal the restoration of full church communion. That has been the presupposition of our dialogue until now. That presupposition would realistically no longer exist following the introduction of the ordination of women to episcopal office."11

IV. SAMPLES OF REASONING IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION

If the well promising dialogue on the issue of examining anew the Anglican orders has been stopped by introducing the women's ordination in the Anglican World, we have to look at what kind of reasoning has been used in

¹⁰ "Since the bishop has general oversight of the community, he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life." *Venice Statement* pt. 5. Cf. G.L. Bray, *Sacraments and Ministry in Ecumenical Perspective*, Latimer Studies 18, Oxford 1984, 38-40.

¹¹ W. Kasper. *Mission of Bishops in the Mystery of the Church...* pt. III.

favour of women's ordinations. Already in 1986 the Church of England has admitted women to the diaconal orders and soon more than 500 of them have been ordained deacons. The discussion upon the diaconate for women was however of slightly different nature that this about the admission of women to the priesthood and episcopacy. The difference lies in the possibility of presiding the Eucharist. Non of less importance was the argument that women's diaconal ministry could be proved by the testimonies from the Church history, contrary to the two other steps of orders, even if the women's diaconate in the history seems to be of different nature to the present meaning of this orders. The preparatory discussion about women's ordination to the priesthood has been summarized by A Digest of the Second Report by the House of Bishops¹² of the Church of England. This prepared the decisions taken by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1992. The later discussion about women bishops may be found in the report of so called Eames Commission: Women in the Anglican Episcopate.¹³ The final decisions have been taken however only by the General Synod of the Church of England in 2012. Even if various Anglican Provinces have already introduced the ordination of women to the episcopate the discussion led in the Anglican cradle—the Church of England—seems to be of primary importance and then will be examined hereafter.

Before going to the biblical arguments let us have a look at the preliminary notes of the protagonists of women's ordination. First is the underlying of ambiguity in the regarding of human sexuality. Commonly known differences between men and women are of anatomical, physiological and psychological nature. The authors of the document *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* adopted the technique of confronting the opinions of opposing parties. Some people then—they write—would emphasis common human nature shared by men and women and these would not stress the differences, referring the ordination to the shared human nature. Those however, who would more stress the threefold difference between men and women, would be more likely to disapprove the possibility of ordaining women believing that only man should be ordained priests.¹⁴

¹² The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. A Digest of the Second Report by the House of Bishops (GS 829). London: Church House Publishing 1990.

¹³ Women in the Anglican Episcopate. Theology, Guidelines, and Practice. The Eames Commission and the Monitoring Group Reports. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1998.

¹⁴ *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood...* p. 8.

Another question discussed always in debates between 'pros' and 'contras' is that of so cold representativity i.e. how God is represented in Christ and Christ in a priest. In a general sense, both men and women as created by God on His image do represent Him in Christ. But who can properly represent Christ? And what does it mean to represent? An ambassador representing his head of state is not a representation of the person, but of an office, and then it is equal if it is man or woman. Then, argue the protagonists of women's ordination, there is no need for a priest to represent Christ in His maleness.¹⁵ This is contrary to the traditional line of interpretation, where a priest acts *in persona Christi*, "taking the role of Christ, to the point of being His very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration."¹⁶

Here we come to the arguments of biblical nature. First is the differentiation between the meaning of a particular text in its biblical context and time: this of patriarchs, of nomadic tribes on the desert or the later influences of Graeco-Roman culture in the first-century Palestine. Is the truth safeguarded in the biblical passages the same in the times when they were written and today? The authors of the quoted *Digest* explain openly: "It involves an attempt to perceive how a text was understood and appropriated in its original context; how the continuing Christian community has reflected upon it and interpreted it through history, and how it now applies in our own time."¹⁷ There from only a step to this sort of biblical hermeneutics which consists on trying "to bridge the distance between the world of the biblical writers and our own."18 What is characteristic in this manner of reading anew the biblical texts is the absolute omission of the centuries of interpretation up to now. This contempt to the tradition could be taken as simple fulfilment of the rule *sola Scriptura*, if it did not mean in the same time the rejection of four and half centuries of reformation biblical teaching and upholding the Church position towards ordination.

Now becomes obvious that once having cleared the foreground from outdated interpretations, the protagonists of women's ordination can reinterpret every biblical text in line with their assumptions. What can be however astonishing in the *Digest*, most of the biblical text quoted (1 Cor 7,4; 11,2-16; 14, 33-36; 2 Cor 11,3; 1 Tm 2,11-15; Ef 5,21-33;) are reinterpreted to prove the equality of man and woman in their humanity, what nowadays is

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 11-12.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

never denied by the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁹ It would be difficult to derive from these texts so far-reaching conclusions as the ordination could refer to the "pure humanity" being common for men and women and in consequence would this open the door to the women's ordination. The humanity (i.e. being a human) of a person can never be isolated from his or her sex, as human beings are always male or female.²⁰

What other biblical texts can then be reinterpreted in favour of women's ordination?

The most exploited text in the debates on women's ordination is perhaps the passage from the Letter of St. Paul to Galatians, chapter 3, verses 27-28: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."²¹ The Paul's statement about the equality of man and woman is often presented as a proof of coherence of women's ordination with the New Testament theology, the later would differentiate the candidates to the priesthood according to their sex, as "all are one in Christ." Such an interpretation didn't seem obvious to the bishops of the Church of England, who took two different approaches towards the quoted text of Paul's Epistle. As we read in the *Digest*: "For some of us the principle is supportive of women's ordination; for others of us the passage is primarily relevant in a baptismal context and other biblical passages have a greater relevance for the question of the ordination of women."²² Then the

¹⁹ Cardinal Kasper made it clear in his address to the Church of England House of Bishops (*Mission of Bishops in the Mystery of the Church*... pt. I), that the position of the Roman Catholic Church: "(...) has often been misconstrued as misogyny and denial of the equal dignity of women. But in the Apostolic Letter 'On the Dignity and Vocation of Women' *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988) and in his 'Letter to Women' (29 June 1995) Pope John Paul II made it clear that the position of the Catholic Church in no way arose from a denial of the equal dignity of men and women or a lack of esteem for women, but is based solely on fidelity to apostolic testimony as it has been handed down in the Church throughout the centuries. The Catholic Church distinguishes between the equal value and equal dignity of men and women on the one hand and on the other hand the differentiation of the two sexes, which have a complementary relationship with one another. Similar statements are found in the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'On the collaboration of men and women in the church and in the world' (2004). Pope Benedict XVI reiterated and made concrete this view in his address to the clergy of Rome on 2 March 2006."

²⁰ The so called *Gender* stream of perceiving human sexuality has no roots in the nature and thus is absurd. We do not also refer to the clinical sexual dysfunctions, i.e. hermaphrodites as this and other exemptions only confirm the general rule.

²¹ Quotation from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Oxford: University Press 1995.

²² The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood... p. 25.

intellectual short-cut is provided leading to the conclusion, that proving the equality of men and women in their humanity makes obvious the acceptance of women's ordination. The arguments of so called 'traditionalists' that such a mode of interpretation by-pass the explicit will of Christ is then totally disapproved.²³ Would the protagonists of women's ordination need find rescue in such wobbly intellectual constructions, if there were real biblical proofs justifying the women's ordination to the priesthood and episcopacy? Non of less importance is that the line of argumentation issued by Anglicans from the Bible omits what the Roman Catholic really stands for. The equal dignity of men and women proved by the biblical texts has never been denied by the Catholics. The argument important for the Catholics that the Church cannot change the will of Christ towards ordination has been simply by-passed by moving this subject from divine to human law.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams did not hesitate to declare in his address during the Vatican symposium on the occasion of centenary of birth of Cardinal Willebrands that it is not Anglican and protestant adoption of women's ordination, but the Roman Catholic refusal of ordaining women that causes obstacle on the way to the full visible unity of the Church!²⁴

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²³ This explicit will of Christ is the reason for which the Catholic Church perceives herself as being not entitled to introduce changes in the matter of the proper (i.e. male) subject of ordination: "Therefore it should not be assumed that the Catholic Church will one day revise its current position. The Catholic Church is convinced that she has no right to do so." Kasper. *Mission of Bishops in the Mystery of the Church...* pt. I.

²⁴ "To take the most obvious instance in the relations between the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches at present, the local decision to ordain women as priests—and as bishops in some contexts—is presented by Roman Catholic theologians as one that in effect makes the Anglican Communion simply less recognisably a body 'doing the same Catholic thing.' (...) The claim of certain Anglican provinces is that the ordination of women explicitly looks to an agreed historic theology of ordained ministry as set out in the ARCIC report and other sources. Beyond that, many Anglicans have been wary of accepting a determination of who can be ordained that might appear to compromise some of the agreed principles about how ordination relates to the whole body of the baptised. This, by the way, would hold for at least some who believe that a decision within a divided Church about a matter affecting the universal ministry should not be taken by a single province or group of provinces. But for many Anglicans, *not* ordaining women has a possible unwelcome implication about the difference between baptised men and baptised women, which in their view threatens to undermine the coherence of the ecclesiology in question." R. Williams. *Archbishop's address at a Willebrands Symposium in Rome. 19th November*

Disagreement among the Christians on this issues constitutes nowadays a serious threat to unity we long for. From what we have said above it becomes also clear that every manipulating of the biblical truth resulting in adopting the solutions contrary to the traditional Christian teaching constitute a serious threat to the unity and faith itself. The time has come for the Churches to intensify their efforts in order to save, where still is—and bring, where still is not—the visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

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CO SIĘ STAŁO Z "SOLA SCRIPTURA"? JAK POSŁUŻONO SIĘ BIBLIĄ W WALCE O ŚWIĘCENIA PREZBITERATU I EPISKOPATU DLA KOBIET WE WSPÓLNOCIE ANGLIKAŃSKIEJ

Streszczenie

Autor artykułu poddaje badaniu tradycyjne znaczenie formuły *sola Scriptura* w Kościele anglikańskim w epoce Reformacji i konfrontuje je z dzisiejszym używaniem Biblii w procesie podejmowania decyzji w kwestiach życia kościelnego i doktryny. Próbą takiego procesu jest przyjęcie święceń kobiet do prezbiteratu i episkopatu we Wspólnocie Anglikańskiej, szczególnie zaś w Kościele Anglii.

Ponieważ wyznania chrześcijańskie są wzajemnie powiązane, decyzje podejmowane w jednym wyznaniu mają rzeczywisty wpływ na resztę chrześcijaństwa. Dowodzi tego istotowa zmiana wprowadzona do dialogu anglikańsko-rzymskokatolickiego przez jednostronne decyzje o święceniu kobiet podjęte przez anglikanów. Kwestionowane decyzje były jednak podjęte na bazie niewłaściwej hermeneutyki tekstów biblijnych i w oparciu o założenia prowadzące do niebezpiecznego skrótu myślowego. Tak oto linia argumentacji wyprowadzona z Biblii przez anglikanów pomija to, o co w rzeczywistości chodzi Kościołowi katolickiemu. Ważny dla katolików argument, że Kościół nie może zmieniać tego, co jest wolą Chrystusa, został ominięty poprzez przesunięcie tego zagadnienia z prawa Bożego do prawa ludzkiego.

Streścił ks. Przemysław Kantyka

Slowa kluczowe: święcenia kobiet, biskupi kobiety, anglikanizm, Wspólnota anglikańska, dialog ekumeniczny.