

Transformations – Theology and Experience of Women’s Ministry

19th September 2011, Lambeth Palace

Introduction

On 19 September 2011 I invited over sixty members of the Church of England – ordained and lay, women and men – to a conference at Lambeth Palace entitled ‘Transformations – Theology and Experience of Women’s Ministry’. Whilst one aim of this event was to review experiences of women’s ordained ministry in the context of current consideration of moves to appoint women to the episcopate, the intention was always to look beyond – to consider what women’s experience could tell us about the inherited models of ordained ministry in both theology and practice and how these might be changed for the better. I was not disappointed.

Throughout the day there was a constructive atmosphere of considering how women and men, working together, could bring different contributions to the process of what I chose to call ‘humanising’ ordained ministry. By this I meant, as I said in my closing remarks, that there is something toxic about the way in which we currently expect the clergy to work: we need, together, to liberate clergy not only from bureaucratic processes but also from inappropriate business models of completing tasks as opposed to engaging prayerfully both with God and with God’s people.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to the day, whether they made formal presentations or participated in the discussion groups.

There was much in the set-piece contributions and in the ensuing discussions and their conclusions, well summarised in this document, that I found both thought-provoking and encouraging. The recommendations made in the process deserve careful reflection. The issues touched on here transcend questions of gender and go to the heart of what it means to be an ordained minister of the Gospel in the Church of England today and in the future. I commend this report of the day’s proceedings to anyone genuinely concerned with the future of ordained ministry in the Church of England.

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Summary of Pre-Conference feedback

Feedback on the experience of women's ordained ministry was requested via the Steering Group's constituencies (DARC, NADAWM, AWESOME, WATCH¹) and via all conference participants ahead of 19th September. Twenty-six pages of material were received and circulated before the day and provided a shared context for our discussions. There was a striking similarity in the experience evidenced and the most frequently recurring themes are summarised below:

Positive experience of women's ordained ministry

'There has been much progress ...where people have seen competent women in ministry, observed women being appointed to some senior positions or taking on high profile roles, and, to some extent, have simply got used to an unfamiliar idea.'

Many contributors agreed that there has been much progress, particularly reflecting on the very warm welcome that they have received at parish level. A couple commented that discrimination had not been a problem for them, that their own diocese appointed as many women as men and another that she felt insulated from the problems experienced by others. Several commented that opposition to women's ordained ministry now comes from a tiny minority in 'pockets of resistance' often led by a single powerful individual and one wrote that we could now simply not manage without women in ministry. However this is not always reflected in the way women's ordained ministry is perceived.

'We are still in the habit of speaking of women's ministry as a problem rather than a blessing. We need to find ways of appreciating the gifts that women bring. Alongside this we need a theology of diversity and theology of leadership which celebrates gender differences rather than always problematising them.'

'It would be immensely helpful if, as a result of this conference, a clear and unequivocal view could be expressed that the ordination of women is now the express will of the Church of England supported by an overwhelming majority of clergy and lay people.'

Working patterns & expectations of priestly ministry

'The expectation of the role is still basically shaped for a single man or for joint ministry between a husband and wife. The model for most women is that their partner works.'

'There is a workaholic streak in ministry which is difficult to counter without it being attributed to gender and being perceived as a weakness and an inability to cope.'

'There is a sense that women need to prove themselves more in ministry than their male counterparts, and that their failings are because they are women, while their successes are despite that fact.'

Many respondents commented that the prevailing model of priesthood is based on a male norm and that this does not fit the pattern of life for most women. There is a culture of overworking and neglect of work/life balance in the Church. These expectations make full time priestly ministry unrealistic for many, given family caring commitments. However, the options for part-time working are very limited. Many women have no option but to serve without stipend. Several contributors called for new models of leadership in the Church.

There were many contributions calling for greater flexibility and for a greater honouring of the vocation to parenthood for both genders. Several respondents mentioned the perceived difficulty in combining priesthood and family life. One mentioned a lack of imagination and risk-taking in seeing the potential of young mothers and the need for the church to address how to help mothers to continue in ministry.

'I think we need a profound rethink about our models of leadership. Whilst most appointments intend to be open to women, the qualities they are looking for, are still Alpha Male.'

¹ Deacons, Archdeacons and Residentiary Canons group, National Association of Diocesan Advisers on Women's Ministry, Anglican Women Evangelicals: Supporting our Ordained Ministry, Women And The Church.

Continuing negative impact of the Act of Synod

'There is a perception that the Act of Synod has brought about ghetto communities. There are many core areas of belief on which Anglicans differ profoundly: within these areas of difference no separate episcopal provision is made – only with respect to issues about women. Women are therefore continually construed as a problem to be solved rather than as a gift or a cohort of redeemed co-workers in the kingdom.'

'The elephant in the room is the Act of Synod and all that it implies and how this 'unlevel playing field' will work through to women bishops.'

Several comments mentioned the continuing negative impact of the Act of Synod and in particular the way in which it has been used to create the expectation of a right to separate, parallel provision where none was originally intended and on the way that women are problematised with continuing negative impact on the Church's mission – wider society does not see women in this way. One commented that discrimination is enshrined in Church law and regarded as acceptable in some Church of England circles – another that this culture allows collusion in the exclusion of women.

There were contributions lamenting: the loss of mutual learning through this separation; the isolation of women ministering in a diocese where the Diocesan will not ordain; the pain of women when people refuse to attend a Eucharist where they are presiding; the difficulty of exercising positions of authority in a diocese where a woman's identity as a priest is not recognised. One contributor remarked that the Church used to lead the way on issues of social justice but now follows reluctantly.

In a diocese where the Diocesan does not ordain...

'At the Oils Mass in Holy Week, women priests are asked to wear choir robes so that no-one will be able to tell which women are priests and which are not. They were also directed to do so for the ordinations...'

Progress towards women as bishops

'We appear to those inside and outside the Church to be so bending over backwards towards trying to include the dissenters that we are losing credibility in the pews and the High Street. People ask 'Why can't we just get on with it?'

Several respondents expressed concern about the negative impact on the Church's mission of such slow progress and on the importance of leadership from the top in supporting women's ministry at all levels. One commented that the same issues are being discussed as 20 years ago. Several commented that the House of Bishops seems to be frightened of those who oppose women's ordained ministry and are keen to placate them whilst underestimating the strength of feeling in support of women bishops from both men and women. There was concern that no further amendment be made to the current draft legislation – that there should be no second class bishops. One contribution commented that the continuing debate on women as bishops leads to the sense that women's position as priests is still a matter for debate in the Church whilst another reflected on how women clergy are assuming that the legislation will be agreed and are shocked to hear that this might not be the case.

'Opposition to women's ministry is often expressed in terms of the clergy and lay folk who will leave the church. Bishops spend a lot of time worrying about these people. The question needs turning around. How many women clergy (good, gifted, skilled women in whom the Church has invested heavily through training etc) have already left the ministry? How many lay folk have already given up on a Church so institutionally misogynistic?'

The integration of ordained women

'Even women who have worked in very male professions beforehand experience the Church as very patriarchal'

- **Appointment to senior positions**

Several people commented on the under-representation of women in incumbencies and senior positions. Some commented that women were more willing than men to go to difficult posts or posts in a different tradition. Others commented that there is a perception that there is an old boys' club at work and discrimination is disguised and therefore difficult to confront. One suggested that there are deep-seated prejudices needing to be addressed and another that discrimination occurs even in theologically egalitarian parishes.

- **The need to support ordained women in developing their ministry**

Many people commented on the need for women to have special support in developing their CV and through ministerial mentoring. The historic exclusion of women from the priesthood made this particularly important. One contributor stressed the need for women to have published to be considered for senior positions and another the need to serve on committees and synods to develop skills. One commented that job descriptions often do not match the skills or availability of women applicants (or the job to be done). Another argued that women needed to be empowered to 'interrupt male assumptions'. Several mentioned problems at interview. Interviewers are often older men, questions are often inappropriate and interviewers needed more training.

- **Experience of clergy couples**

Several respondents commented on the difficulties facing clergy couple in terms of their under-remuneration (whether in housing or stipend) and in affording child-care and in the assumptions around whether they are called to work together. One commented that it is often the woman who takes the NS or part-time post.

- **Institutional bias away from parish towards NSM or sector ministry?**

Several people commented on the discrimination and bullying some women suffer in parishes. Several people commented that women are steered towards part time NSM ministry or choose it because it is the only option that allows time with the family. However, there were comments that NSM ministry allowed little responsibility and had low expectations and it was difficult to return to stipendiary ministry after a spell as a NSM. Some women describe feeling pushed not called into sector ministry or they choose sector ministry because they will have the protection of employment law.

'I decided to become NSM but I feel like I was pushed into this because the long hours mean that I just won't see my boys grow up otherwise. I still want to be a full time priest but with a husband who works full time I can't see how we can do that. I feel disillusioned and fairly stuck ... I want to go back into full time ministry; I want to be challenged and intellectually stimulated. I want responsibility and to go as far as God wants me to go, but I also want a family life. The only women priests with young children who seem to be able to have this are those whose husbands give up work to look after the children.'

'When a woman priest says she is unwilling to go to a particular post because of family commitments (husband's job, children in school, being near ageing parents etc) she is considered non deployable and so only offered non stipendiary posts whereas when a male priest in a stipendiary post says he is unwilling to take a particular post for the same reason, further efforts are made to find him a suitable stipendiary post.'

'Those part-timers who are self-supporting (more of these are women) suffer from low expectations of them (no-one is expecting future leaders to emerge from such a situation)...

'One of the reasons that I work in sector ministry is that they have to abide by anti-discrimination laws. During my time through selection, through training and as a curate, I was made to feel like a second-class citizen. I couldn't even imagine going back to parish life and having to deal with all the hassle'

Need for a statistical database and guidelines on best practice

Several contributors commented on the need for national data to be gathered on the work patterns and remuneration of women clergy and why they leave. One suggested the development of a women's desk at Church House to hold this brief. Several suggested that further research is needed on, amongst other things, how to enable women to flourish as mothers and as priests, on single women in ministry on whether women and men have different spiritual and pastoral needs. Several suggested the need to develop best practice guidelines on ways of working that are gender aware.

'As well as attempting to follow best practice in others organisations we should develop our own best practice which includes a theology of gifting, equality, rest and recreation, work and family, accountability and affirmation. To do this would benefit women and men engaged in ministry today and in the future.'

Bible Study on Romans 12:1-2: Dr Paula Gooder

Opening Prayer

God of all transformation, make us people of such thanksgiving, that transformed in mind and body, we might bring transformation in the world you love so much. Amen

Romans 12.1-2

I urge you therefore, sisters and brothers, because of the compassion of God

- ***to hand over your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy and pleasing to God – your thoughtful worship,***
- ***and don't be shaped by this age but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you can examine the will of God – the good, pleasing and perfect.***

Introduction

Note the placing of the passage and its significance – at the pivot between Romans 1-11 and 12-16; these two verses can almost be seen to be the summary of everything that Paul will say about living the Christian life.

Because verse 2 is so often explored apart from verse 1 it is important to recognise that this is a two-part command about bodies and minds in Christian living.

The Motivation for Living as We Do

The compassion of God :

- the word (*oiktirmōn*) reflects a care for the things of another (not the usual word for mercy or compassion) and so may refer to the whole of Romans 1-11; as a result of all the compassion that Paul has spoken about, we now live our lives differently.

To Present your Bodies

Against many common attitudes to embodiment and spirituality, Paul makes clear here that a proper worship of God involves our bodies.

- The gendered nature then of our life in Christ.
 - Notice also that this is something pleasing to God.
- The whole life dimension of worship
 - In contrast to the temple cult – where people take the (dead) animal and then go about their lives again
 - Presenting our bodies implies that there is no part of our existence that is not dedicated to God – i.e. you can't take it back again (aorist infinitive)
 - Important to notice the importance of living here
- Logical worship – the word *logikos* is fascinating here.
 - In Greek philosophy *logikos* is what separates humans from animals
 - It has the resonance of something that is thought through
 - Logical worship has the element of a deeply thought out response to God – as a result of all our theology we hand over our bodies to the compassionate God who loves us.

Do not shape yourself

In contrast to the aorist of the previous sentence these imperatives are present.

- The on-going nature of our resistance and transformation
- You could argue that not being shaped etc. is the effect of handing over your bodies to God (ie body and mind are not that separate (especially since handing over your body is *logical* worship)).

Conform and Transform – one of those rare occasions where the link is only in the English and not in the Greek.

- Being shaped by an age – the one that is obsolete and passing away or the age to come
- We allow ourselves to be transformed (*anakainosis*) and therefore to become like the new creation
- So that we can examine/test/ try out the will of God – which has all the hallmarks of the age to come – the good, the pleasing and the whole.

Take O take me as I am

Summon out what I shall be

Set your seal upon my heart

And live in me.

Panel presentation 1: The Revd Canon Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James, Piccadilly

At this moment in the Church of England, given the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1994, it can be argued that we are still in early days, but for this generation of women and men in the church, it seems as if we have been discussing this for too long. Much of the discussion centres around whether there is a problem or not. “I don’t have a problem” is something often said to women priests – and the truth is that in church and society, this is said much more often than “I do have a problem”. Just yesterday afternoon, as I was walking back from the pub discussion group with some parishioners across Piccadilly Circus, some tourists came up and asked if they could take a picture of this strange creature – they had never seen a woman in a dog collar before – and the atmosphere between strangers on the street was celebratory, energetic. It was a yes not a no.

If a praxis model of theological reflection is employed then the experience/action part of that circle – of prayer, action, reflection, is for the most part characterised in the Church of England by the *acceptance* of women behind the altar, with some serious exceptions of course – and reminding ourselves that the vast majority of the 2 billion Christians in the world do not experience women as priests.

I want to steer away from “I don’t have a problem” and reflect very briefly on two ways in which I have been inspired to inhabit priesthood; one biblical model, and one theological tool. I also want to suggest that the dynamic between women and men as priests and bishops is a moment of such possibility, transformation and renewal that we should count ourselves privileged to be alive in this generation.

Holy Wisdom and Faithful Imagination

Holy Wisdom

The character of Holy Wisdom, whose mantle falls on Jesus, is the one who in Proverbs 8 stands at the crossroads and calls for justice. She is the one who is present with the Creator at creation, she delights in human beings and she makes them friends with God. Hers is a binding, holding energy as recorded in the Wisdom of Solomon – and this wise, creative, authoritative feminine presence is a strand of Christian tradition that is evidently there, but has often been lost under the sound of the clashing antlers of Peter, Paul, James and John. This biblical model, expounded so powerfully by the Hebrew scholar Margaret Barker amongst others, is a strand of Hebrew and Christian tradition in which women can be clothed as we take our place as priests in the Church of God.

Of course I’m not suggesting that all women themselves are like this; binding, creative, wise, authoritative – or that men aren’t – it’s important in this debate to keep steering away from an essentialist “women are always like this”; but this tradition of Holy Wisdom is a tradition with which women can identify as we exercise authority in the church. While previous generations of women found ways to do this necessarily outside the hierarchy – as mystics, as martyrs, as consecrated virgins, free from the exclusively male exercise of power - in our time, women are finding ways to inhabit this tradition, not from a position of historic exclusion but from standing our ground behind the altar, in the pulpit, and as priests recognised in wider society.

Faithful imagination

The theological tool is that of faithful imagination. When a woman presides, new ground is staked out in that the church’s interpretation of the Eucharist is challenged, and congregations themselves are challenged. If the spiritual perspective of the average person is to imagine Jesus of Nazareth saying “take, eat, this is my body” then they are simply unable to do this when a woman presides. This has been a loss for many people and they have articulated that in many ways – mostly in the phrase something like “it’s just not right”. But there is a

wonderful opportunity here for the exercise of faithful imagination. Communion services are not memorial services but are foretastes of a heavenly banquet. The eschatological dimension of Eucharist is vivified by the presidency of women as it is a sign that change is possible, that things do not always have to be as they are. The future is now; what was impossible has now happened.

For women ourselves this presents responsibility as well as delight. When I'm asked - as I'm sure you have been many times - 'what difference do you think you make as a woman?', I'm often stuck for an answer: bearing in mind I've worked with immensely empathetic collaborative and sensitive men and some authoritarian, task focussed women, it's not right to make any generalisations; but some of the difficulty is for women that if the institution itself seems to have been vaguely or at times strongly reluctant to embrace this change, the temptation for women is to try too hard to fit in; to do it like the men have done it. It is at times very hard to remain alive in here as we navigate between the twin dangers of seeking too much approval from the ones who reject us or becoming the kind of jaw jutting "this is me, take it or leave it".

The confidence and security that we have as women and priests is found only in our identity as those made in the image and likeness of God and in nothing else. In a society where information is prized above wisdom and the all-pervasive perspectives of marketing and business are arguably fetishised, it is possible to suggest that the church has never needed to express the wisdom and imagination found in the story of God more in its history. The acceptance and celebration of these gifts, fuelled by not a little anger at the waste of potential in society and church has meant that women's ungovernable energy is now given expression in priesthood. This must be given expression too in the episcopate without qualification. Because of this theological imperative, this is a moment to ask new questions of women and men, lay and ordained, for the sake not only of the church but of the society we serve.

Panel presentation 2: The Rev'd Dr Sarah Coakley, Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge

Introduction:

Once upon a time, O best beloved, in the mists of aetiological Ur-time (I'm speaking of course about the 1970s and 1980s!), the argument was mounted in the Church of England that if and when the Church ordained women, the Church itself would be *transformed*. The reason for this optimism colluded, as we now see, with a psychologized secular gender theory of 'complementarity', 'androgyny' and 'wholeness', popular at the time. When women were ordained, it was said, the Church would become more compassionate, more caring, and commensurately less competitive, less cynical – in short, less 'masculinist' and 'patriarchal', and more 'feminine' and 'motherly'. And it would be a 'whole' Church at last.

Forty years on, and nearly twenty years into actual women's priestly ministry in the Church of England, it is as well to ask the probing and somewhat uncomfortable question: *has* the Church so changed? Has the Church been 'transformed', and if so, was it right to expect it to be transformed in *this* way, according to an overtly 'essentialist' view of gender and womanhood?

My suggestion to you this morning is that the Church has indeed already been profoundly changed, although not very obviously according to the logic of the 1980s 'complementarity' thesis. Whether most of its change can be accounted for simply by the presence of women in its priestly ranks, however, is a moot point. My more depressing analysis, in fact, is that in some deeply worrying ways which have nothing obviously to do with women's ordination, the theology of Anglican priesthood has gone profoundly awry in this same time-span (more on this anon); and to some extent women priests have found themselves colluding in these negative developments simply in order to try and prove their worth and 'equality' alongside male colleagues in the process of this transition. It is as if, just as the moment of opportunity for real transformation emerged (with 'the woman at the altar' symbolically challenging the hegemony of symbolic patriarchy in the liturgical realm), so, simultaneously, and in such a way as now to court the hermeneutics of suspicion - a new iron cage of bureaucratic and financial utilitarianism has gripped and stifled the priestly theological imagination, and so rendered these new and creative developments that the advent of women priests augured almost void.

I The Jeremiad: Three Problems Which Still Prevent Positive 'Transformations' in Women's Ministries

1. The Open Sore of Incoherence

The still-unresolved question of the female episcopate reveals, in the starkest terms, that our Church has lapsed into a theological incoherence more powerful than any I can think of in Anglican history. As it is left to our Roman Catholic and Orthodox interlocutors to remind us (the interjection by Ephraim Lash at a recent Synod meeting comes to mind), there is no such thing, in any theo-logic of any veracity, as a legitimately-ordained priest who is *inherently* banned from the episcopate by gender. Such an idea is not just an offence to the secular world, as a matter of 'rights' and 'equality' (although it is that, increasingly, as is witnessed in recent parliamentary discussion); it is more truly an *offence to truth*, a running sore of incoherence in our theological life-world without whose healing no other, related, theological project in our Church can go forward and flourish. As a theologian I cannot but stress first this primary point – one which even the 'enemy' has to concede (ironically, my own eldest brother, legal advisor to the Guild of All Souls and passionately opposed to the ordination of women, has explicitly acknowledged this): where there is theological incoherence, only legal incoherence (The Act of Synod) can follow.

Perhaps the main problem is that this incoherence is often fatally confused with three other things, characteristic of our ecclesial tradition, which are emphatically not the same phenomenon: *first*, the Anglican

tradition of theological balance - the desire and commitment to honour both Catholic and Reformed traditions which was at the heart of the Elizabethan settlement and of Hooker's polity; *second*, the concomitant insistence on human courtesy to one's theological opponents, which remains an admirable ongoing Anglican trait; and *third* (and much more disingenuously) the recent Anglican tendency to wallow in priestly powerlessness, failure, confusion and self-abnegation – as if this were a virtue in itself, rather than – as I see it - the unfortunate perversion of a truly kenotic Christlikeness.

In short, this current problem of theological incoherence over the female episcopate is in a qualitatively different category from the (merely supposed) historic 'incoherence' of, say, the theology of the eucharist in the Elizabethan prayer book, or of the doctrine of predestination in the 39 articles. Instead, this new incoherence is a deep suppurating wound running right across our Church; and its appearance has coincided, perhaps more seriously, with the undermining, under financial and other restrictions, of any ongoing official body of theological thinking to inspire and goad our Church into astute and informed theological reflection. Thus it is not, I think, a coincidence that this strange blockage to the female episcopate has occurred during a period when the Church of England's Doctrine Commission has been in abeyance.

But another problem, too, has reared its head in the same time-span, and has simultaneously threatened to sideline authentic theological thinking. It may be that these two problems are not unrelated.

2. The Secular Bureaucratization of the Ministry

For, in this same period there has also been a notable turn in priestly life to secular bureaucratic models of 'leadership', 'efficiency' and mission-'efficacy'. Along with these developments has crept up on us an almost-unnoticed capitulation to the idolatry of *busyness*, in which male women priests (often landed with impossible jobs overseeing multiple parishes, but in a desperate desire not to be found wanting in comparison with their male peers), have for the most part haplessly colluded. The resultant undermining of the primary priestly roles of presence, prayer, and spiritual mediator-ship has, I believe, been devastating to the Church's true theological and missiological stature, not least because men who had hoped that women would *recall* them to these abiding values and practices can then turn this disappointment against them.

No wonder that some of our more gifted and energetic women priests feel that the only way forward is ambitiously to *compete* with men in this new 'business' model of the Church's organization; yet the loathing that they then accrue to themselves is itself a sign of the Church's false consciousness: men work the system in one way, but it is held against women if they join the new game. Yet all along the underlying problem remains unaddressed: *is* this creeping ecclesial bureaucratization indeed the way forward, or instead a deviation which represents at least in part a capitulation to the secular world's values and culture?

3. Theoretical Confusions about 'Gender' and 'Sexuality'

Hardly surprising is it, then (given the ongoing ambiguity about secular and theological norms), that confusion still reigns in the Church about 'sexuality', 'gender'-roles, and expectations for clergy family life. The screams of pain on these issues are to be heard in many of the submissions made by women priests in preparation for today's meeting. As the essentialist 'complementarity' thesis of the 70s and 80s has died and passed out of fashion, a host of conflicting secular post-modern alternatives have flooded onto the stage. But no clear, agreed, *theological* rendition of gender or 'sexuality' has emerged concomitantly, only a false stand-off between conservative or fundamentalist renditions of 'biblical' norms, and liberal, post-modern versions of sexual libertinism.

Something is missing here, something occluded by the false attempt by many of the first generation of women priests to emulate, and even intensify, their male colleagues' modes of 'success'. In short, the first and third problems outlined here have become inextricably tangled up with the second: if the first has colluded in an incoherent vision of priesthood, and the third has wallowed in an ongoing uncertainty about gender and sex

roles, it was at least in part because the Church was unconsciously capitulating to a worldly, bureaucratic vision of its own role in 'leadership'.

Why then, given this depressing and negative analysis, do I nonetheless remain so resolutely *hopeful* about the future of women's ministry in the Church?

Something in the elusive logic of Paul's argument in Romans 5.3-5 (not Paula's passage, but not unrelated) transfixes me and continues to hold open a door to the future. If Paul is right, then 'suffering' can produce 'endurance', and 'endurance' give way to 'character', and 'character' to 'hope'; it is precisely the authentic 'character' of priesthood that I seek to re-discover in order to open us onto this 'hope'.

II The Balm of Gilead?: Why I Remain Hopeful

I want to note very briefly in closing three counterbalancing reasons I have for hope in women's ministry, and ministry more generally, in the Church of England at this time.

1. Anglican Theological Regeneration

Even as our national Church faces the most profound economic and political crisis it has confronted for many decades (if ever before), and the Anglican communion is rent with strife and threats of dissolution, Anglicanism is also undergoing a remarkable theological and spiritual renewal which even now may not be obvious to many embattled priests, male and female, who are toiling away in the English parochial trenches. The fact is that world-wide, Anglican theology in various forms and manifestations is riding high; it is exerting very significant influence on its ecumenical conversation-partners (Roman, Orthodox, Protestant), and it is slowly rooting itself into new, practical, endeavours of mission and spiritual renewal. In these endeavours, women, and specifically women priests, are playing a very significant role. There should be no triumphalism here, but it is a reality.

2. A New Anglican Theology of Priesthood/Ministry

I cannot claim that such a new theology of priesthood, in contrast, is yet immediately available; but it seems to me that it is what we are being most urgently beckoned towards at this time, in such a way that women priests will neither fulfil the role of a falsely-essentialist 'other' who mops up what men are disinclined to do or be, nor be seduced into secularized alternatives which merely ape the goal-driven ills of our time. Instead, priesthood must witness above all to those values which our culture has neglected to its grievous cost (whilst simultaneously imposing negative forms of such on its rejected and unemployed ones): I mean the witness to rest, to prayer, to resistance to the Pelagian idolatry of 'busyness'. Only thus will priesthood regain its essential memorializing of transcendence; only thus will it authentically 'remember', in the way that Jesus required of us, the 'remembering' of his own mystical Body.

3. A New Theology of Gender and Sexuality

And only thus, likewise, will the Church also be enabled to think 'gender' and 'sexuality' afresh too, through painful searching of the ambiguous but demanding authority of Scripture, and through fresh reflection on the ascetical theology of the early church in conversation with Scripture - with its (now profoundly counter-cultural) insistence that our gendered and sexual lives are set on a course of continual *conversio morum*, not boxed up into ready-made modern categories of 'orientation' and 'sexuality'. Only thus shall we be able to give new mintage to the rich Pauline notion of the 'glorious liberty of the children of God' to which we are all called; only thus shall we begin to grasp the full implications of what admitting women into the presbyterate and episcopate means - symbolically, sexually, spiritually - for the life of the Church and for the world.

None of this can be done in an instant. But it cannot be done at all unless we first attend to the open theological wound we have currently inflicted on ourselves. The Anglican affliction of theological incoherence about women's ministry must first be healed. Only thus can we go forward.

Panel presentation 3: The Most Revd Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop said he thought that there had been two important models of expectation about ordained women's ministry, both of them wrong in their own ways. The first was **co-option**, which meant that women priests were expected to behave just like the men before them. The second was **messianism**, which predicted, conversely, that everything would change as women brought a uniquely female contribution. Instead of either of these, our theology of priesthood must grow out of our theology of humanity.

Human experience and the culture of ordained ministry

It was important to recognise and understand the culture[s] of ordained ministry. Even after the Church of England dropped the requirement for a celibate priesthood, it retained an inherited model of ministry which ignored connectedness, relationships and integration. Ordained ministry is, however, essentially relational. 'The church' and 'the world' are not two different realms, but two aspects of the same reality, and people are sons, daughters, wives, husbands, parents and so forth just as much as they are ordained ministers. Therefore it is vital always to ask what sorts of human experiences are taken into priesthood. Ministry is not whole unless it embraces the experiences of all, including, of course, the laity.

Complementarity?

The 'complementary' view of women's ministry is equally simplistic in that it implicitly regards women as all and exclusively possessing certain attributes (for example, of compassion or empathy) with which they complement the existing ordained male ministry, whereas the truth is much more complex: any individual man or woman possesses a mixture of abilities, attitudes and aptitudes, and neither sex has a monopoly of certain 'priestly' characteristics. There may be aspects of women's experience which incline them to approach issues in certain ways rather more than men might do. What is important is for the Church to recognise the implications of issues such as pregnancy, maternity and child care responsibilities and to create models of ordained ministry which not only accommodate those factors but also ensure that opportunities for deployment are not artificially and unnecessarily curtailed as a result.

In summary, the full acceptance of women's ministry at all levels in the Church provides an opportunity to rethink models of ministry for all, thereby broadening the scope for action beyond the narrow limits of 'women's ordination'.

Panel Discussion

The three presentations were followed by a panel discussion, chaired by The Rt Revd Kay Goldsworthy

Questions raised included how far we should allow the debate to be shaped by those who are uncomfortable with change, and the **significance of gender**, for example in the Eucharist, in a post-gender society; in responding to the latter question, Bishop Kay referred to Bishop Victoria Matthews' description of taking on the ministry of oversight, 'slowly turning purple'. It was also noted that a woman at the altar transforms the experience for female laity, and for many men too this is a world-changing experience. In addition, women preaching is tremendously important in an integrated understanding of ministry and humanity.

In relation to the Bible study, another question was about the **language of sacrifice for women**: who are we handing our bodies over to – God or the church? Here Paula Gooder responded by noting the parallel with Paul's slavery metaphor: we are slaves of Christ, a slavery in which we find perfect freedom. In the same way we are to hand over our bodies so that we have a more perfect understanding of control – not so that we lose control of or diminish our understanding of our bodies.

Concern was expressed that the debate on women bishops is viewed with incomprehension by outsiders. Yet it is not only the Church that has significantly gendered behaviour.

The question of **theological incoherence** was raised. If it is true that there is no theological sense in ordaining women as priests but not bishops, one woman asked why we continue to affirm those who do not accept women. The theology has been done; can we now not listen to what the church has experienced since then? The Very Revd June Osborne talked of the pastoral opportunities she had in a recent high profile funeral. 'For me, it was an example of the complete incoherence of the Church's agony about women in episcopal orders as a group of women who had been at the funeral came and spoke to me afterwards and expressed such gratitude for the ministry of a woman in that situation'.

Keynote Address (edited):

The Stewardship of Authority: Living Relationally in a Changing World **The Rt Revd Mary Gray-Reeves, Bishop of El Camino Real, California**

Introduction/context

- Bishop Mary was the fifteenth woman in the Episcopal Church, ordained bishop in 2007. Gender was really not a big issue in her appointment.
- Her family: husband Michael and two teenage children. She manages being a bishop, wife and mother like any other professional woman.
- The Diocese of El Camino Real is geographically and culturally a very diverse place. The total population is about 2.5 million people. The diocese itself is 275 miles long.
- Church membership is about 13,000 (congregational membership). Average Sunday attendance about 5,000, ranging from 12 to 500. 48 congregations worshipping in 4 languages.
- Average Episcopalians - tend to be middle class, well educated and white; there is lots of outreach ministry to the physically and spiritually poor: to homeless students, prisoners, farm workers, gangs.
- Ministry opportunities are about sharing the good news of Christ with people where they are: sharing our resources; creating safe space for spiritual exploration and Christian community; creating a multi-generational and multi-cultural church.

Power and how we share it

Today I want to talk to you about power and how we share it. I want to define power as the ability to act, and everybody has the ability to act. It is inappropriate for us, as human beings and Christians, to think that we have no power.

Our diocese... El Camino Real, has existed for 30 years. The first two bishops both came in with a pretty traditional model of Episcopate, pretty much my way or the highway. And it didn't go well with the DNA, if you will, of the diocese; in our faith culture honouring the gift of power in all people is really key.

Power is shared differently in different contexts. So what might happen in one diocese or congregation isn't necessarily going to work out the same way in another. I'm fully bilingual, but I don't express my power quite the same way I do in one of my Latino congregations as I might in one of my Anglo highly educated congregations. It's a different setting and it's about learning how to speak the language of power and work with the context. Because it's not my first context, I think, "How am I going to act? How will I use my power to act?"

We always have a choice about power between agency and victimhood. We always have a choice. We don't ever have to be a victim based on what somebody thinks of us or based on what a whole structural system says about us. We always have the ability to act.

I want to advocate for the honest sharing of views on scripture, on theology and ethics. We have a triad partnership with the Diocese of Gloucester and with the Diocese of Western Tanganyika coming out of the Lambeth Conference – how much difference could you get in a room and have a relationship that might work? And it works really well.

But we started with a few principles. One was that we weren't out to convert the other to our point of view and the other was that we would be honest. So I was honest about who I am, how I read the text and how my theological values work and what's really happening in my diocese; and each of my partner bishops also abided by these principles. And it makes a really big difference when you're trying to work out a situation in which everybody has some power.

Two different kinds of power

So I'd like to talk about two different kinds of power or authority

In the church, we talk about authority and the authority of ordained ministry. And our exercise of authority is not just in the action but also in what's going on inside of us. And so there is an inherent spiritual authority, and a sense of wisdom of when to act and when not to act.

Unilateral authority involves power over, a zero sum game, a server and a served. It's the most common way we think about the use of authority and the use of power. We often think about it in the church and we often apply it to bishops.

The problem is, that as the world's cultures become more complex the idea that a zero sum game is going to work is just falling away. Life is far too complicated to say, "If you do this, then this will happen and it will always stay that way." It's far too complicated to say, "I'm going to have power over you and treat you as that I have more power than you and you have less and that's going to work out." It doesn't work that way any more.

It's interesting because in Christianity we often work on the model of a server and one to be served. So in order for your ministry to exist, in order for my ministry to exist, I need someone who needs me. Right? But you can hear a lot of stuff in the room about days off being completely tapped out. That's not working too well.

And I'm not saying that we should lose this paradigm, but I am saying that Jesus actually offers a model in the gospels of mutual servant-hood. If we talk about mutuality and servant-hood, that changes the conversation and it honours that the person who may need something from you also has something to offer you. And that changes how it works. It actually stops the objectification of people.

This option is **relational authority**. And I don't want to label one of these ways of using power bad or one of these good. The reality is that, as a bishop, sometimes I'm unilateral in my authority and I say, "I'm the Bishop, this is how it's going to go." And then I try to be as relational as I can within the unilateral option that I have offered. It's probably not good to use one or the other exclusively but, to just develop that repertoire, that stewardship under your authority. And what's the best way to use it right here in this given moment?

Relational power

Negotiation is at the heart of relational power. One of the tricky things in this debate around bishops who are women, is that it's very hard to negotiate with people who think you don't exist or who don't want you to exist, and that makes negotiation pretty tricky. But any time you can find your way into a position where you can say, "I want to give you something and I'd like you to give me something of mutual servant-hood of negotiation" that's your 'in' to transformation.

We do have to be willing to be transformed, to have our minds renewed. We do have to be willing participants. God does not force that upon us. But relational authority works by way of saying, "Let's just find a little opening." In our triad partnership, that's what we did. And we took it day by day in the first four months.

People were saying, "There's something extraordinarily close about you all, in your partnership." And I say, "That's because we argued for the first four months." And it's true because we told the truth to each other and we had to find our space of negotiation. What were each of us willing to give in order to create some safe space that we could inhabit together so that something could grow and develop? Relational authority requires us to keep the greater good in mind.

The use of relational power is messy. It requires high tolerance for difference and the ability to live with decentring, which means that you are not always going to be in the position of having more power. But in the bigger scheme of things, you're going to get to where you're going. So that sub-zero game, you just have to let go of it.

The thing I love about relational power is that everyone gets to participate in the decision making and living out the ministry. You get a lot more creativity when you're in relationship with people. You discover things about people you had no idea about and there's always something fruitful that comes of it. Most importantly, because it's our mission as a church, the reconciling presence of Christ is made known and we develop a greater trust in that power and authority which, as Christians, we believe is relational. We are a relational faith.

Be careful about saying relational power is what women do. I know lots of men who are great at relational power, but our House of Bishops *is* different because there are women in it. We do negotiation a lot better. A lot less unilateral posturing goes on in our House because there are women there.

But to culturally survive, women have to negotiate: our place in the culture requires us to subconsciously negotiate all the time. It makes it really hard and really painful in the church when we feel like we have this thing called Baptism and the Ministry of all the baptised and, yet again, we have to negotiate our place. And that's why it's so painful. We have to do it all the time, everywhere, and we would long to be in a church where we didn't have to do that.

Experience of one parish that opposed women as bishops

I have one congregation who have a problem with my being a female, their new bishop being a woman. They are a 1928 prayer book congregation which is traditional in its orientation, you know, facing the wall, old liturgy and so on. I was just a kid just learning to read when we let go of the 1920 prayer book in my church so it's really not part of my language or church culture at all. But it's very strongly part of theirs.

Their priest, when I arrived, had been under investigation for something that was settled, but literally as soon as it was settled, somebody pulled up another complaint. So I'd been a bishop maybe two weeks and I called the Rector and said, "We have to talk." And this is one of those unilateral times. Discipline, that's my territory.

So he arrives in my office with twelve members of his vestry and I think, "Well this is interesting." And they're just determined that I'm going to close the church. And I said, "I'm not going to close the church, let's just take a big deep breath and calm down for a minute and talk this thing through". Unfortunately, I had to discipline the priest and it was at a time of unilateral authority where I said, "Either you do this or you don't get to be a priest any more."

And he chose not to be a priest any more and he left the Episcopal Church. And on the one hand, that was a shame. On the other hand, it actually got him to a place he needed to be and got him the healing that he personally needed.

Meanwhile, it gave me the opportunity to say to the congregation, "Let's negotiate how we're going to have a common life. The only non-negotiable thing is that we have a relationship. We must do that, not only according to the Canons but because we're Christians and we're going to have to learn to live with each other. So let's take it really slow and figure it out."

So I counted all of our parish meetings, I counted all of the vestry meetings as visitation time. I said, "Let's just be a little bit more liberal with the canons and not worry about worship at the moment." And that took about three years and I celebrated my first Eucharist there last fall and then next year we plan to do a Confirmation.

And we have a fabulous relationship; and one of the great things is that this 1928 ageing congregation, which is actually growing in its own right, is partnering with the latest Fresh Expressions emerging church thing that we're doing in the diocese. Now would you ever put a 1928 prayer book congregation with Fresh Expressions?

But what's happening is that a young woman, who was a missionary in Sudan, has just returned from Sudan and we had this congregation that's just sitting out there in this town which used to be mostly Anglo, Anglos have all

died off, Latinos have moved in, the Anglos didn't know what to do with them twenty years ago, the church died. So we're going to reinvigorate it and re-plan it.

But the 1928 congregation has a real heart for this town because one of their former Rectors built their church. So they came to me and they said, "We've had a vestry meeting and we've decided we're going to tie some of our rector's time to help this ministry and we want to help it grow." So I said, "Great, it can be the preaching station for your Church." And they are so excited.

Now if we'd stuck to the canons, if we'd kept our relationship as minimally ... as minimal as it could be, we would never have got to this level of creativity. You see, I can't think this stuff up, I need a Holy Spirit. This was way beyond my imagination.

It's a great story, and I just can't wait to see what happens. So I encourage you not to limit yourself, but to create space for relationships where God will do infinitely more than you could ask for or imagine, through this kind of relational stewardship and authority.

Legislating for women to be bishops

I think it was Hafiz, or one of the Sufi poets, who said, "Beyond the field of right-doing and beyond the field of wrong-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there". And I think you need to find your way to that space.

As I ponder the strategising about legislation [for women to be bishops], the most difficult thing about it is that you are going to prevent reconciliation from happening and that's what I'm struggling with as I watch this thing happen. I'm thinking, "Wow, they're going to delay reconciliation between these two sides even longer."

My experience as a bishop, which is a unique experience to bishops, is that we've got to work with the canons. Because when the bishop gets called in, I'd say you're at the point of the canons. And that means that you're at the lowest common denominator of relational functioning. The relationship has completely broken down when you have to go to the canons and say, "Here's what the law says you should do." And so when you say you're going to create canons, that prevents reconciliation from happening, I'd ask you to think about that.

(In response to a question asking for clarification)

If you legislate the relationship, what you're saying is, "It has to be this way" rather than just leaving it open, and letting people figure it out. I know, as a woman I'm not going to force myself on a congregation. That's abusive. I'm going to find a way to work with them. And I want to trust. If our ministry is not reconciliation, what is it?

I'm just suggesting that while legislation might feel like the way to calm it down, what you might end up doing is preventing the healing from happening.

Group discussions

After a service of Eucharist and lunch, conference guests joined one of the following seven groups and had an hour to explore their topic together.

- **Scripture and attitudes to women**
Leader: The Reverend Ian Paul, Dean of Studies, St John's College, Nottingham
- **The Ordinal: the bishop's calling and its impact on women**
*Leaders: The Rt Rev'd Richard Blackburn, Bishop of Warrington and
The Rt Rev'd Kay Goldsworthy, Bishop of Perth, Western Australia*
- **The shape of the Church and synodical processes**
Leader: The Venerable Christine Hardman, Archdeacon of Lewisham and Greenwich
- **Liturgy and language**
*Leaders: Ms Janet Morley, freelance writer and speaker and
The Reverend Dr Charles Read, Vice-Principal and Director of Studies,
Norwich Diocesan Ministry Course*
- **Different patterns of ministry available to ordained women**
Leader: The Reverend Rosemary Lain-Priestley, Dean of Women's Ministry, Two Cities Area, London
- **Issues for clergy couples**
Leader: The Venerable Sheila Watson, Archdeacon of Canterbury.
- **Patterns of appointment and statistical insights**
*Leaders: Prebendary Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics, Archbishops' Council
and The Reverend John Lee, Clergy Appointments Adviser.*

Each group was asked by the Archbishop to conclude their discussion by answering three questions:

- 1. What did the group want to say to the bishops?**
- 2. What did the group want to say to the culture/society?**
- 3. What did the group want to say to the church?**

Each group had one minute to report back their answers to the three questions posed, and these are listed at the end of the group summaries.

Scripture and attitudes to women

Leader: Ian Paul Scribe: Katrina Barnes

Introduction

Ian Paul started by posing the following question: ‘*What do we need to do to enable the Church of England to come to a common mind on what scripture says about the ministry of women?*’ In considering women bishops, our starting point must be scripture, and the debate is focused on particular passages and questions. What does scripture say about the roles of men and women, and a possible hierarchy within gender relations eg in Genesis 2 (especially in the light of the Awesome/Reform dialogues and also as discussed in his Grove Booklet, *Women & Authority*²)? Other parts of scripture to consider are the ‘difficult passages’ that have sometimes been read as forbidding women to speak or ‘have authority’; how Jesus engaged with women; Paul and his relationship with his co-workers.

Discussion

In interpreting the Bible, we have to ask what the text said *then and there*, to those differing cultures, and what the text says here and now, in our multi-cultural society. The many cultures that make up who we are will have an impact on what we see in scripture and how we interpret it. But how do we interpret scripture in a broad church? Do our theological colleges and courses teach good hermeneutical skills to their students or do some toe their party line? All of us come to scripture with some form of presupposition.

In the past, argument has centred on the authority of women to teach and preach. Now it appears that the goalposts have moved to the issue of ‘headship’ and ‘authority’ for both FIF and Reform. *ie. a female bishop is not recognized by both of those groups as having the authority to appoint a male bishop to serve in her stead.*

The group felt that demonstrating, from the scriptures, that women can have authority to preach, teach and lead needs to happen, but that focusing on this must not distract us from preaching the good news. It was argued that we should avoid playing theological ‘ping-pong’ – but equally that we do need to engage with what the Bible says, and this requires a level of biblical literacy that is sometimes lacking among Christians.

Each side in the debate about Scripture needs to be open to allowing the word of God to challenge us rather than believing we know what the Bible says. We all need to be provisional... We also asked if it is acceptable for parishes, clergy and readers to pick and choose which parts of the structures and or scripture they will or not work with; to readily admit they are not in communion with certain parts of the Church of England.

What we want to say

What do we need to do to enable the Church of England to come to a common mind on what scripture says about the ministry of women?

To the House of Bishops

How can the House of Bishops read scripture from a female perspective (albeit with good female theologians)?

To the culture we are in

We have allowed debates about women’s authority to hinder our witness to the gospel and its failure to understand what is happening on its doorstep.

To the Church

The question of biblical literacy in the Church is very important; so many of our members across the traditions have a very limited knowledge of the Bible, which makes it difficult to grapple with biblical theology.

² Ian Paul, *Women and Authority: the key biblical texts* (Grove Books B59, 2011)

The Ordinal: the bishop's calling and its impact on women

Leaders: +Kay Goldsworthy, + Richard Blackburn Scribe: Lis Goddard

Introduction:

For her opening presentation +Kay outlined the duties and calling of a bishop as found in the Ordinal. She drew particular attention to two points in the text, first of all the point where having outlined the ministry of the bishop the introduction says *'Thus formed into a single communion of faith and love, the Church in each place and time is united with the Church in every place and time.'* This is at once a rich and significant theological statement and one which +Kay pointed out was not in the Ordinal of the Anglican Church of Australia.

She also drew attention to the question asked by the Archbishop of the candidate after outlining the weight of the task: *'Do you believe you are called to this ministry?'* To which the answer is expected *'I believe I am called'*. While there is a sense in which the language is used to describe the weight of the call of the church, it is also there to describe the church's reception, confirmation and affirmation of that call.

Two questions put to the group were: *'In what ways will the charge of the ordinal and the life and ministry of the bishop be transformed by the experience brought to them by women priests?'* and *'Will having women ordained as bishops inevitably lead to a fresh understanding and application of the Ordinal?'*

Discussion:

Theology versus Reality

Whilst there is a desire to think theologically about these issues, the structures of the Church make fine theology hard when once one is in role. Then, there is a lot of negotiation to be done between men, women and the Church and it often has little to do with the theology.

What it is to be a Pioneer

The situation for the first women bishops would be complex, and inevitably it would be later generations who would make the role their own. The Church must think carefully about how the first woman/women are ordained bishop. The first woman to be ordained bishop is likely to be a suffragan ordained alone beside a man, and all the weight of being the first would fall on her shoulders. Perhaps half a dozen could be ordained together, creating a critical mass to gather round, and a cohort to work and learn together. This would continue the communities of support and encouragement which have been so important over past decades.

The idea of an all-female ordination was not universally agreed with. +Kay pointed out that she and +Barbara Darling were consecrated within days of each other and this meant that neither bore the brunt of publicity and they could always talk to the other about what was happening. Just to have one other made a difference.

The presumption that the first female bishops would inevitably be suffragans was questioned. It was pointed out that it is not unheard of for men to progress directly to diocesan, and there are plenty of women who have the experience who would merit such an appointment. There is a pool of talented and gifted women.

What do we mean when we speak of Episcopal Ministry?

We have missed an important opportunity to examine the nature of the episcopacy. A few years ago there were sessions in General Synod reflecting on the episcopacy from the Methodist Church, and the conclusion of the debate promised a report into twenty-first century episcopacy in the church. The nature of the episcopacy needs to be informed by the role elsewhere in the world. It was suggested that bishops should spend 3 months alongside bishops from other parts of the world learning to do the job in a missionary context, thus challenging the CEO model.

We also need to do more work on the role of the bishop in terms of the structure and organisation of the Church; we need to put more money into the managerial side in terms of training and expectations.

The nature of the Ordinal – Symbolism and Liturgy

Liturgy can change the way one views things, because through liturgy we act out what we believe. In other words, the Ordinal should not be seen as pure text; it is always interpreted by action. For example, currently it is not uncommon for a new bishop to be surrounded by a wall of 70 men, which in itself gives a clear message.

The corollary of this that there is a key power in symbolism, and thought need to be put into how we act out what we believe about the episcopate of women. If the first woman to be ordained is surrounded by a wall of 70 men that will carry with it all sorts of messages about power and could be overwhelming. One of the bishops present remembered from that moment the weight of the hands, and being enveloped in darkness.

Is it possible to construct the liturgy around a particular candidate to enable them to be carried through the liminal space? It was related that when Katharine Jefferts Schori was consecrated she chose to walk in the middle of the procession rather than at the back, to show that she viewed herself as one with her fellow bishops, and actions spoke louder than words. But it would be important not to make changes for women that set them apart from other bishops, as people will be looking for reasons to view them differently.

Consecrations currently reinforce the identity of the House of Bishops. One sees them closing ranks: thus at the Peace by and large they only exchange the peace with each other, and their body language is 'twitchy' if anyone 'breaks into their ranks'. This and other examples reflect a world more to do with the House of Lords than a counter-cultural church. The challenge for women will be how to inhabit authority with reconciliation and commitment, acknowledging that sometimes there are roles and titles which go with that role.

It was noted that neither the CW Ordinal nor the BCP order for the Consecration of a Bishop speaks of the bishop as the focus of unity. It was interesting, given that this part of the bishop's role is such a live and contentious issue. This should be considered further as part of the nature of the episcopate in the 21stC.

The question was also raised about the weight and breadth of expectations which the Ordinal lays upon the bishop, without even mentioning the managerial duties which are inevitably there today. Women will have to carry all these, with the added burden of having those who do not believe that she is in orders at all. This needs to be addressed, otherwise it will make it very hard to deal with those who cannot accept their authority.

How will terms such as 'Reverend Father in God' and 'My Lord Bishop' relate to women? Will they project something onto them? Should we as both women and men be playing along with those projections? 'Father' may be inappropriate parental language, which infantilises the people, and there is the important question of how it plays out missiologically. Such terms will be lost by the way in which the episcopate is embodied by women, and as it is reinterpreted in a way that the wider culture understands.

What we want to say

To the House of Bishops

We would ask that there be some strategic thinking about how women bishops are introduced. The weight of being the first female bishop should not fall on the shoulders of one woman. We also ask the Bishops to reflect on how they are perceived; for example, please can you share the peace more widely at consecrations.

To the culture

Is it still appropriate to be speaking of a 'Reverend Father in God': is this missional language? Is it infantilising of the people of God and saying something inappropriate and alienating to the culture?

To the Church

We urgently need to address the nature of the episcopate, for its own sake, not from the perspective of gender, also remembering the promise made to our Methodist partners to do this which has never been honoured.

The shape of the Church and Synodical Processes

Leader: Christine Hardman Scribe: Celia Thomson

Introduction

Christine Hardman spoke briefly about the progress of the draft Measure through diocesan Synods – so far all positive. A draft Code of Practice will probably go to the House of Bishops and then to the Synod in Feb 2012. The House of Bishops does have the authority to amend the legislation (after a 50% majority), but would have to refer it to the dioceses again if the amendment was substantial. So far, we hope, all is on course for July 2012.

If the Measure is passed in July 2012 it will go to Parliament and then for Royal Assent. Only then will the Code of Practice be voted on in Synod, when a simple majority is needed. Women cannot even be nominated as bishop until the Code of Practice is approved – 2013 at the very earliest.

Christine Hardman then presented the following paper to the group:

The Shape of the Church and Synodical Processes

Discussions on women bishops cover a very wide range of issues – but the only arguments that count are those grounded in our theology and ecclesiology. Theological arguments are largely concerned with why we should (or should not) have women bishops. They are foundational – but are not the focus of the workshop. The ecclesiological arguments – are more about the how than the why.

In terms of the 'how', the crunch issues have proved to be firstly about the nature of the authority of the diocesan bishop and any other bishop operating in a diocese and secondly (and this is a concern for traditional catholics) about 'sacramental assurance' in brief, where maleness is deemed to be necessary but not sufficient.

Theologically, there is very little difference in the arguments about women priests and women bishops. Ecclesologically, we are in a rather different situation and everything we do becomes heightened in significance because of the centrality of the role of the diocesan bishop in the ecclesiology of the Church of England.

Following on from the Reformation, church structures did not change. We continued to have bishops, priests and deacons, dioceses and cathedrals. This is one of the reasons we claim to be both catholic and reformed.

The diocesan bishop is both principal minister and the Ordinary in a diocese. The diocesan bishop has these responsibilities by virtue of being bishop of the diocese. Other bishops in a diocese exercise the diocesan bishop's ministry and responsibilities. All ministry in a diocese is the diocesan bishop's and is shared with others. The formal mechanism for such sharing is 'delegation'. Here we come right up against our first crunch point. If we are to preserve the shape of the church whereby the diocese is the full expression of the local church then any provision for shared Episcopal ministry has to be by delegation and not by transfer. Even the Act of Synod did not undermine this principle. Although many behave as if the 'flying bishop' is 'their bishop', in fact with the Act of Synod all episcopal ministry is exercised by delegation and there are no 'alternative' jurisdictions.

The argument is not about undermining the authority of bishops who are women but about changing the very nature of episcopacy itself and hence the nature and shape of the Church of England.

On the second major 'crunch point' – sacramental assurance – this is linked to the argument about delegation versus transfer of jurisdiction. There are those in the Church of England (probably very few actually) who believe it is completely impossible for a woman to be a priest or a bishop. There are rather more who believe that this is such a major change in the tradition that the Church of England does not have the authority to make this decision alone and there needs to be agreement from the Roman Catholic church and possibly the Orthodox Church as well.

Underlying both these stances is a question about the very nature of the Church of England itself. Is the Church of England part of the Universal Church or is it a schismatic sect.

Canon A1 – the first of the foundational canons of the Church of England – says that no member of the Church of England is at liberty to deny that the Church of England truly belongs to the Church of Christ:

A 1 Of the Church of England

The Church of England, established according to the laws of this realm under the Queen’s Majesty, belongs to the true and apostolic Church of Christ; and, as our duty to the said Church of England requires, we do constitute and ordain that no member thereof shall be at liberty to maintain or hold the contrary.

As Jane Steen and Mark Steadman express it in their excellent booklet, *Women Bishops: Understanding the Arguments: ‘If the Church of England is part of Christ’s Church, it does what the universal Church does. So if the Church of England has women bishops, women are bishops. Instead of women bishops making the Church of England questionable, the Church of England, by virtue of its participation in the universal Church, guarantees that women bishops are properly bishops and so they may minister, delegate ministry and exercise delegated ministry.’*

The Roman Catholic Church does not of course consider that the Church of England is part of the Universal Church with authority to ordain. This is why no Church of England orders are recognised by Rome and why priests and bishops joining the Ordinariate had to be ordained.

What we believe about the nature of the Church of England is of course central to our faith and our mission. The current state of play in the Church of England is that there are some who do not believe that women are or can be priests. Where the issue is restricted to the order of priests there is a degree of containment of the problem. If you don’t believe a woman can be a priest you avoid worshipping in a church where there are women priests. The question of Sacramental Assurance becomes much more difficult when women become bishops. If you don’t believe a woman can be a bishop then you will not regard those whom she has confirmed or ordained as being confirmed or ordained. If a woman is not a bishop, the argument goes, then those whom she ordains are not priests, even if they are male. If you hold this view then the only way for the Church’s sacraments to be assured is for men to be ordained by men and to be known to be ordained by men all the way back to the first apostles.

This is where the earlier argument about the nature of the Church of England is important. Again Steen and Steadman get to the heart of the matter – *‘However doubtful we may be about the personal worthiness of a priest or bishop, the sacraments they celebrate are true and valid because the Church guarantees the effectiveness of the ministry entrusted to them’.*

If that reality of the nature of the Church of England is not accepted and if we establish in law, a separate line of apostolic succession within the Church of England as many desire – then we will, *de facto*, be creating a church within a church. It is for this reason that the only requirement in the clauses making provision in the current legislation is for the priest or bishop to be male. This is to avoid enshrining the legal establishment of a ‘pedigree’ which alone is seen to give sacramental assurance.

The battlefield for this issue will be fought through the Code of Practice which many hope will go beyond the ‘male bishop or priest’ specified in the measure to assist those for whom maleness is necessary but not sufficient.

To resist this plea might seem ungracious. However, resist it we must because what is at stake here is the very nature and shape of the Church of England within the Universal Church— no more no less.

The Church of England is a very small part of the Church Universal but it may be that her very smallness and particularity may fit her to play a prophetic role where the grace of the Holy Spirit may be discerned.

Discussion

In bending over backwards to try to accommodate a small minority (when other organisations might have said “tough”) the C of E harks back to the profound theological mistake of not celebrating the opening of the diaconate and priesthood to women in 1987 and 1994, disregarding the psychological effect on some women of being told that their ministry is a problem or a mistake. There is a perception that the House of Bishops feels safer when they are being nice to opponents than they do when contemplating opening the episcopate to women.

“Reception” – the C of E **HAS** received the ministry of women in its life and yet we are contemplating enshrining in legislation the theology of taint, casting doubt on its own orders. If so, we would be perpetuating a dysfunctional church (taking from our culture a paradigm of dysfunctional families).

The Archbishop spoke of a commitment made to those opposed. To whom were promises made? The recent paper by Rosalind Rutherford was referred to – no such promises were in fact made. It is wishful thinking.

What is our culture saying to us? The Church is refusing to speak honestly to itself. When issues are not addressed properly they explode (eg institutional racism). If we don’t listen, what will happen?

What about our mission? The culture out there is further and further away from the church. There IS opportunity out there for us as women’s experience shows.

British cultural behaviour makes us polite (“nice”) face to face, but this often evades the underlying tensions and conflicts that are then reflected on afterwards in anger and bitterness. This is not mature behaviour. We need to be more open and candid in our face-to-face dealings with one another.

What we want to say

To the House of Bishops

Please do not amend the legislation any further. This would completely undermine the C of E’s theological and ecclesiological integrity for reasons stated above.

What do we want to say to the culture we live in?

We turned this around to ask **‘What is our culture saying to us?’**

The Church is refusing to speak honestly to itself and we learn from our culture that issues explode when not properly addressed. We need to be aware of what might happen if we don’t listen.

To the Church

Please can we lose this sense (almost) of shame that women are ordained, and instead be excited and celebrate the possibilities.

Liturgy and Language

Leaders: Charles Read and Janet Morley Scribe: Hilary Cotton

Introduction

Charles Read introduced the group to his work on the use of feminine language for God in *Common Worship*. In 1994 the Liturgical Commission had published its recommendation

'that God may be addressed in prayer in a variety of ways and that authors should be encouraged to incorporate a wide range of metaphors, especially those drawn from Scripture, in the forms of address of the prayers.'

His review of *Common Worship* concluded that it had missed many opportunities for a fuller use of inclusive language for God, and that almost all of the feminine imagery had been relegated to the alternative texts. Most of the main collects began 'Almighty God', an adjective that is associated with masculinity, although there are numerous other possible attributions available that are less gendered.

Discussion:

Four themes emerged from the discussion:

The relative absence of feminine imagery for God in mainstream *Common Worship*; reflection on the desire for the numinous amongst many outside the Church and how we might respond; the power of hymns and a strong plea to challenge pejorative use of the phrase the 'feminisation of the church', where that is used without evidence and as a negative generalisation about what has been happening since women were ordained as priests.

Common Worship

In discussion, concern was expressed over when permission was needed to alter texts or use different ones. Particularly under *Common Tenure*, parish priests felt more vulnerable to complaints from parishioners. Since any change in the liturgy tended to be viewed with suspicion by some, it was difficult to redress the gender imbalance of *Common Worship* without taking great care to explain one's motivation, which was a disincentive to do so.

The group wondered whether holding to some phrases as unalterable, especially when they are gendered might be idolatrous. 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' was given as a particular example, which has such powerful historical resonance and status for the church and yet is so predominantly masculine.

In touch with the numinous

The experience of people's positive reaction to the Royal Wedding, with its use of traditional liturgy, had surprised some people. Its pace, phrasing and poetry had struck a chord with many outside the Church. We have a great well of resources to offer in naming the numinous, and it will be important to continue creating poetic liturgy for the modern world. Many on Twitter appreciate prayers written immediately for difficult situations in the news. This may be a manifestation of folk religion but it is a significant point of contact between the church and those outside.

The power of hymns

People remember hymns more reliably than prayers or sermons. It is therefore important to use hymns with care, especially as most older hymns tend to use gender-exclusive language. Our hymns express a huge range of theologies and are a great resource for teaching. Rosalind Brown found in her extensive survey that the Church

of England has no common hymnody. This is unlike the Episcopal Church in the USA, for example, where hymns have to be confirmed for use by their Liturgical Committee, and there is one Anglican Hymnbook. Writing hymns is a very effective way of bringing a group together and engaging them in worship – one member gave an example of a homeless group writing their own hymns and songs.

'Feminisation of the church'

All of those present resented the cavalier use of this phrase to describe negatively the effect of women's ordination. Statistics provided on the day showed that women are not 'taking over', either in the priesthood or in membership of congregations. This is not a new anxiety: the Church Times in the 1900s wrote that 'men are not coming to church because the hymns are too feminine', despite the vast majority of images of God in hymns being masculine. Modern worship songs emphasise emotions (traditionally associated with femininity), whereas older hymns include theological and biblical thinking as well as passionate praise.

What we want to say

To the House of Bishops

Please support and encourage the use of more expansive language and imagery about God wherever possible, and hold the Liturgical Commission to account when new liturgy is prepared by them, since the 1994 remit spoke of using the widest possible variety of metaphors for God;

When visiting parishes for services, note and discuss their use of hymns;

At clergy days/conferences regularly discuss theology of worship (in relation to gender) and how this is represented in liturgy, including hymns.

To our culture

We as the church have resources to articulate the numinous. We hear your desire to pray, and we wish to enable you to find words for the magnitude of God with more confidence.

To the church

Please resist the negative use of the phrase 'feminisation of the church', challenging those saying it to support it with evidence.

Is holding fast to particular phrases in liturgy (eg 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit') potentially idolatrous?

Different patterns of ministry available to ordained women

Leader: Rosemary Lain Priestley Scribe: Rachel Weir

Introduction

Rosemary Lain Priestley opened the discussion by outlining a problem faced by many women offering themselves for ministry in the Church: a substantial number of women can't fit the model of priestly ministry that is the norm or they choose not to because of the value they place on other caring responsibilities. The Church loses out on their gifts.

Discussion

The following points emerged in discussion

1. A lack of flexibility

There is *not enough flexibility in the present model of ministry* – it is 'one size fits all' and was designed with a traditional male pattern of life in mind: that is, a pattern where the priest is either *single* or *supported* by a wife and family and the whole family is free to follow the father's vocational demands. Many women can't fit this model - and many don't want to. The difficulties women are facing as they try to fit this old pattern are well illustrated by the contributions received before the conference.

2. Rift between stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry

There is *a huge rift between stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry* that starts at selection. Deployability criteria work unfairly against women in allocating funding for training and in allocation of curacies. Stipendiaries are assumed to be the only people with real leadership potential. There need to be more permeable boundaries between stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry.

3. Prejudice against part time working

There is *a prejudice against part time working*. In some dioceses curacies must be a minimum of 60% of a full time week and huge emphasis is put on being 'available' which doesn't fit at all with patterns of childcare. This bias to full time working ignores whether people are modelling good lifestyle choices in their ministry and their integrity of life as a priest. There is an assumption that part timers are cheating the system in some way or simply not 'proper' priests.

4. Perceived conflict between priesthood and motherhood

Traditional models have understood motherhood and priesthood as mutually exclusive. These models are still very powerful in the Church. Priesthood and motherhood are both traditionally understood to be sacrificial vocations demanding unconditional availability. Where these traditional ways of thinking prevail they can provide a powerful block to the ministry of priests who are also mothers

5. Differing cultural expectations

Different cultural expectations lead to different perceptions of men and women undertaking the same tasks. If a man goes to the school gate he is lauded for getting so involved, a woman in the same situation would be thought to be unable to manage her childcare arrangements.

6. The importance of autonomy

Recent research shows that *autonomy is the key factor* necessary to enable women to combine the demands of priesthood and motherhood. In fact, there is huge potential for flexibility and autonomy for women in the Church when compared to other professions.

7. The impact of a spouse's work

Women's opportunities for exercising ordained ministry *vary hugely according to how flexible their partner can be*. Patterns of ministry need to be much more sensitive to the needs of families where both partners are working outside the home.

8. The need for a national database

It was noted that *there is no national database* currently operating to record the patterns of ministry that have proved successful for women. We need to share good practice on flexible working and have a helpline available for problems at curacy level and beyond. Responsibility lies with the Church to ensure it improves its practice in this area. There should be a 'women's ministry' desk at Church House to research and advise on patterns of ministry as well as monitoring statistical trends in women's appointments.

9. The sustainability of full time working patterns

Although, part time and flexible working are important, not all women want to work part time. There is a significant issue for women and men in finding ways to work sustainably *full time*.

What we want to say

To the House of Bishops

We are losing gifted and skilled women who are not coming forward or are giving up because they can't fit the model of full-time stipendiary ministry on offer. There need to be different patterns of ministry available that are not simply *non-stipendiary*.

The Church needs to monitor the work patterns and remuneration of all women clergy and understand the reasons why they leave parish ministry.

To our Culture

We want to model a different way of being that is about fullness of life and not exhaustion, that demonstrates attentiveness and stillness - that is more Mary than Martha. But at the same time we want to authenticate the messiness of women's lives, in celebrating an incarnational theology that really values the godliness of Martha's ministry.

To the Church

This is a *kairos* moment - an opportunity to reshape models and patterns of ministry that are sustainable for women and men, and at the same time draw in the gifts of our ordained women.

Issues for clergy couples

Leader: Sheila Watson Scribe: Rachel Watts

Sheila Watson introduced what she felt might be some of the issues facing clergy couples:

- The difficulties faced by couples who met while training in terms of deployment issues thereafter.
- The fact that there were very few couples where both were in full time parish ministry
- The limited number of part-time, flexible and paid posts
- The unhelpful view expressed by some Bishops in the past that 1 or 1.5 stipends should be enough for a couple, if the stipend is money to live on. What remuneration is about is a theological issue and the concept of stipend has become more like a salary.
- How do couples handle the two sacraments of Ordination and Marriage?

It was concluded that many of these issues were the same for clergy whose spouse was not ordained.

Geographical issues could arise whatever the spouse's job. It can be an issue finding two jobs within the right area. Some clergy spouses have jobs that make it difficult for them to move around with ease. The difference is that the Church has a monopoly unlike eg banks, law firms etc.

Money is an important issue, but how money or lack of it affects ministry is not always understood. Clergy couples are dependent on the church for their income and therefore doubly vulnerable. Often one of the clergy couple is underpaid because of all the housing parts of the stipend that they don't receive. Many clergy couples end up paying to go to work because of the cost of childcare. Often clergy do not have family locally to help them. This can also be the case with NSM/ SSMs.

There were questions about residence in parish ministry. Some ask how can you be part of the community when you are not resident? However, this already happens in multi parish benefices. Parish Reps and Bishops/Archdeacons may have a model of ministry in their mind that does not match up with an incumbent who does not live in the parish.

There was a strong call for parity between dioceses, and a clear process for clergy couples; at the moment there seems to be no consistency. Some dioceses pay housing allowances while others do not. When clergy couples do a job share is it fair that the stipend is only paid to one person? Dioceses could be creative and flexible in appointments, including half or part time posts. It was questioned if money should be put aside for this flexibility to be able to happen, and whether that would be fair.

More consistency is needed in dealing with maternity leave. In Derby Diocese someone is put into the parish to help during maternity leave. In Canada retired clergy do interim ministry during maternity leave. It was felt that diversity was good for the church, including mothers having children. Family and vocation are both a gift. Flexibility was needed: how much of a full time job can be negotiated? Can a mother work part time without having to move? Sometimes the church can do things better than the world.... Discussion ranged around issues, but the church should celebrate the commitment of clergy couples, rather than simply highlighting the difficulties!

What we want to say

To the Bishops

Clergy couples are totally reliant on the church financially; please celebrate their commitment and look for ways to support them eg self-supporting clergy still have to pay for childcare. Parity and consistency of practice across dioceses is important.

To the culture

It is good for a couple to live together. To support this there needs to be flexibility in patterns of ministry, especially parochial ministry.

To the Church

Ministry needs to be re-imagined. Parenting and family issues need to be taken into account. Job-shares and flexible working need to be worked out in the life of the Church.

Patterns of Appointment and Statistical Insights

Leaders: Lynda Barley and John Lee Scribe: Jane Hedges

Introduction

The session was presented in two sections. Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics, Archbishops' Council gave a presentation of statistics relating to the deployment of ordained women and John Lee, Clergy Appointments' Adviser for the Church of England, spoke about his work with clergy seeking new posts.

Statistics

The statistical data slides are included in the Appendix at the end of the Report (p37).

The following issues were highlighted in the presentation:

Stipendiary Clergy – see slides 2 & 4 (Appendix - page i)

In the next three years it is expected that there will be 600 less full time equivalent priests, the majority being male. The number of women stipendiary clergy is projected to remain more stable in number, but will have a slightly older age profile.

Lynda drew our attention to a recent publication that suggested that people may feel threatened by what they see as the feminisation of the church, as it will appear that proportionally there are more women clergy. In the group discussion this view was challenged as it was the experience of a number of people in the group that their own congregations had a good proportion of men in them.

Age Profiles – see slides 7 & 8 (Appendix - page ii)

Self-supporting clergy have an older age profile than stipendiary clergy. Full time stipendiary women tend to be a little younger than full time stipendiary men. Lynda added to this that the average age of a male incumbent is 53 and of a women incumbent is 52. The average age of self-supporting ministers is older.

There was a good deal of discussion in the group about age profiles as there was one group member, a younger woman, currently at an evangelical training college. She reported that she was the only woman there under 30, whereas there were a lot of young men. It was perceived to be a problem that churches with a strong evangelical tradition in particular are calling out young men while not giving the same encouragement to young women. It was also noted in the group that we almost seemed to have moved backwards in terms of young women's vocations as some of the older women in the group recalled how there had been a good number of women under 30 training for ministry at their colleges some year ago.

Ordination of women: Resolutions and Petitions – see slide 15 (Appendix - page iv)

We noted that only 5.9% of parishes have resolution A in place, 7.1% resolution B and only 3% resolution C.

As a group we were struck by just what a small proportion of the Church this is and yet we are spending such a lot of energy of trying to find a solution to keep these people happy!

Appointments – John Lee

John Lee spoke about his work as Clergy Appointments Adviser, reporting that in 2009 there were 272 clergy on his list of people looking for appointments, 49 of whom were women. In terms of the women he helped place in 2009 (some of whom were carried over from 2008), 25 moved to posts in which they were in sole charge, 2 became Team Rectors, 14 assistants (including Team Vicars), 4 withdrew from the list and 6 were unplaced.

He expressed frustration that people who were good, faithful, priests often found it very difficult to get jobs because they were not very good in an interview situation. He also expressed the view that many clergy have a view of the church that regards certain people as "in" and others as "not in".

John shared a paper with us entitled “Team Rector Posts - Why are priests not applying for them?”

He said from theological/ecclesiological viewpoints conservative evangelicals are often not keen on Team Rector posts as they have reservations about the dilution of clear authority and leadership that comes with all team posts; while traditional Catholics who often feel under threat, are tending to seek more isolated posts.

He reported that female clergy are by and large less likely to apply for Team Rector posts and more likely to consider Team Vicar posts. He said this was a generalisation but it has been observable over the last ten years there have been too many women step back from leading teams for any other conclusion to apply. He believes that the majority wish to work in collegial relationships and not in hierarchical systems.

He drew attention in his paper to the lack of training offered to those who are going to lead teams, to the loss of faith in team ministries generally, and to the frustration of people ordained when they are older that their previous experience is often ignored when they apply for team leader posts.

He quotes a female priest whom he describes as “successful” & “of “ mature years” as saying this: “I have never heard of a team (rather than a group) that works ... ever ... which is why I would never apply for one, or wish to work in one. I just don’t think the majority of team rectors know enough about group dynamics”.

There was a small amount of discussion around this final point which some people in the group felt was a rather jaundiced view of teams. However, there is obviously work to be done in terms of encouraging women to lead teams - in the way they think appropriate rather than falling into hierarchical/authoritarian patterns.

Other general points which John made in his presentation were that he often feels that women in particular do not wish to push themselves forward and find it hard to take risks for the fear of being turned down. It is true for men as well as women that there is a problem with people having to put themselves forward for jobs and having to build themselves up rather than being able to rely on being asked to do a particular job.

There was a small amount of discussion in the group around the problems generated by competitive interviews and justification by box ticking, and not enough credit given for holiness, wisdom and encouragement of relational caring.

What we want to say

To the House of Bishops: Be adventurous in the people you appoint to senior roles and as bishops.

To our culture: In our new appointment system for senior posts in particular, have we taken on inappropriate models which the secular world has now moved on from? Perhaps the church should have confidence in our traditional culture of caring.

To the Church: We should be paying close attention to the statistics around age profiles of the clergy, and encouraging young women in particular to offer themselves for ordination (Evangelical parishes seem to encourage young men but not young women). If we don’t do this, in a few years time there will be a severe shortage of women ready to be archdeacons, deans & bishops.

Archbishop's Concluding Remarks (edited)

The Archbishop began by saying that it is important that the conversation doesn't stop here. [This has been] a theological conversation in the broadest sense, because we've been looking for, if you like, God-shaped meanings that cross different kinds of discussion about where we are in thinking about women's ministry in our church.

A change of culture

One message that's come through very clearly in terms of what this group would like the bishops to hear is that the House of Bishops and the College of Bishops need to prepare for a change of culture. A change of culture in how things are done, otherwise we're back to co-optation; a change of culture in preparing the way for this.

The point was made by one of the groups that the one bishop who has to do it first as a woman in the group is deeply disadvantaged and all the more likely to be subject to the twin and opposite pressures that we've been discussing in various ways. So I want to flag that very clearly as something that the bishops need to hear.

How do we prepare ourselves for this change? How do we first of all as bishops look at the limits, the constraints in what we're already doing and how we do it, even before our membership changes? And how to ask those critical questions in the most constructive way I think is one of the things I'm carrying away from this conversation. It's I think for the bishops quite a complicated path to tread between fostering the collegial feeling of a community of bishops and becoming the kind of exclusivist club that was talked about. I actually think we've done reasonably well in recent years about being more collegial in a positive sense within the House of Bishops. I also understand that that can come across as a more inwardly looking or a more – what should I say – self-reinforcing model.

Changing ministerial patterns

Coming through a number of contributions is by no means a simple issue about where the leverage is for change in ministerial patterns. Again and again I've heard people saying there is something actually rather toxic about our assumptions around how clergy work. That's not rocket science. I don't think anybody will be surprised to hear that, male or female, Episcopal or other.

And if that really is the case, well why do we go on doing it? It's not even a case of "Why do you go on hitting your head against the wall?" "Because it feels so good when I stop." Because I don't feel that we're really going to stop in a hurry. So where's the leverage? Where are the levers of change there?

And I suspect that it's becoming more and more urgent for this kind of conversation to draw in Ministry Division, and quite a lot of people in Synod, who again may vote for change in this or in other areas and not always ask "And what are the levers for making that change actually happen?" If we want change actually to happen and to be sustainable then we have to ask these questions as part of pursuing it I think.

The nature of episcopacy

A couple of other things: I was very glad to hear the point raised about talking through what we mean by a bishop. The impact of ecumenical discussion on this I think is important and I'm not entirely sure that we've really got that into the mainstream yet.

And perhaps this is symptomatic. We've discussed the ordination of women to the episcopate as a set of problems predicated on the fact that we know what bishops are and we don't quite know what women can do. And that's not very helpful either to women or bishops, if you see what I mean. Whereas I suspect there are some far reaching questions connected to what I've just been talking about concerning what's essential in the bishop's ministry. I think some of the things that [Bishop] Mary said earlier today are very pertinent to that.

And what my experience in Wales of exploring an alternative ecumenical model of episcopacy did was to give us some guidelines, some visions of what episcopacy might be if what some people used to call the Episcopal sub-culture were not quite what we assumed it was.

Biblical literacy and reading the Bible adequately

Biblical literacy is not just functional literacy. It's a matter of being alert to the fullest range of meanings that those words possess. And if you're going to be alert to the fullest range of meanings you have to have the fullest range of readers. So a group whose readership is restricted is actually not going to be a fully literate group. So I just want to make that connection in response to the double point about literacy. And so that needs to go back to the bishops as a question about their biblical literacy. You have to ask at some point "Who's not here?" before you know how far you're reading adequately or intelligently.

The broader question about biblical literacy in the church I think hardly needs to be underlined. Most of us know what the problem is and most of us, happily, also are aware of just what an appetite there is for it when it is attractively opened up.

And if there's anything I would want to leave as anything like a charge with this group, for myself too, it is to model that kind of inviting Bible study which is the most transforming thing any of us can be engaged in if we're serious about what and who we are as a Church. Because the scriptural text is there not as a set of foundation rules to be interpreted, as laws are by case judgments, it is there as a world, as the sign, the sacrament dare I say of new creation. As you read any one passage you ask, "So where's the new creation element coming through here and here?" And if that's how we do it that does become an invitation, I think, to renewal for everyone involved; personal renewal and communal renewal.

The bureaucratising of the priesthood

I suppose the way I understand this is a distancing of priestly ministry from all those things which a number of people have mentioned that have to do with the intuitive, the relational, the unfinished. Bureaucracy exists partly so that you can say, "I've done that." And I think ordained ministry at any level is rather profoundly about knowing you've never done that. And perhaps what we're saying in resisting the bureaucratisation of the priesthood is something about the necessary incompleteness of ordained ministry in the church. There is always something more to discover. There is always someone else with a question that you haven't thought of.

So I think Sarah [Coakley]'s put a very serious question to us there which is worth thinking through because something that I've often found myself saying to ordinands is the great difficulty in ordained ministry of telling the difference between proper professionalism and malign professionalism.

Malign professionalism is creating the structure that allows you to say, "I've done it. It's all right." Proper professionalism is rather obviously transparency, accountability, taking responsibility for what you do and its consequences. Making sure that you have some opportunity of growing in – yes, let's say it, in excellence, in virtue, in transparency and honesty in what you're doing. That's professionalism in what I believe to be the absolutely right and theologically defensible sense. And it's sometimes rather difficult to know where that is clouded over by the malign professionalism that treats this just as something you can finish with.

Beyond complementarity: a prophetic theology of gender

Sarah talked about a prophetic theology of gender that is a way of talking about men and women in the Body of Christ which went beyond both a rights scheme and a facile complementarity model. Men do this, women do that, and lo and behold, miraculously and wonderfully, by God's providence they fit together beautifully.

How do we get beyond a secular, rather two-dimensional discourse about rights and what can sometimes be a rather unhelpful mythology about complementarity to something that's really social, historical, actual, personal, relational etc? And I don't know but I'd be quite keen to find out. And I hope that in the light of some of what's been said today that will remain on the table for us. And I'm sort of encouraged about that because in my

reading of the Bible, my partial reading of the Bible, my partly illiterate reading of the Bible, I don't read in the New Testament either a rights discourse or a complementarity discourse. So what is going on?

The humanity of the priesthood

The last thing I think I want to say on the basis of what's come up, is really back to the point that so many people have touched on: the humanity of the priesthood. That humanity of the priesthood and the episcopate wonderfully symbolised quite simply by [Bishop] Mary's slide of her family but also I would say by the slides of her ordinary work in the diocese; the humanity of priesthood and episcopacy.

But it does seem to me that if we have an ordained ministry in the church, and if part of the function of any ordained ministry is to help the church be the church, and if the church truly is the church when it is the human community that is Christ's body among – then the ordained person, deacon, priest or bishop is not exempt from modelling the new humanity.

The ordained person doesn't just talk to other people about how they become better human beings or more effective parts of the Body of Christ. The ordained person is a part of the Body of Christ and therefore involved in modelling the new humanity. And so if we ask whether this or that form of ordained ministry models a humanity that looks full or joyful or renewed, maybe that's the crucial question. And frequently the answer is no, isn't it, for men and for women?

And the challenges that have come up in that area today about employment practice and work patterns, about couples in ministry, a whole range of issues, does this ministry, this human ministry, look as though it stands for an attractive, a transforming and transformed new humanity? Because if it doesn't we are actually not doing what we're supposed to do and we're treating ordained ministry as if it was something other than the life of the Body of Christ. So it's perfectly all right for a congregation to flourish and a priest to be crushed? I don't think it is all right.

We all know how the pain and the cost of ordained ministry can feed the life of a community. And I think that's what St Paul is talking about in a lot of 2 Corinthians. But we can't leave it there because that both dehumanises and super-humanises the ordained ministry. It dehumanises because it says it doesn't really matter what happens to these particular persons that God loves in Jesus Christ. That's dehumanising. And these particular persons in Jesus Christ who have collars round their necks and various coloured shirts are the ones who do the work for the Body of Christ including the sacrificial suffering. And everybody else just sort of free wheels on it.

If today is indeed a celebratory event – and I hope some of it at least has felt like that – if it's a celebratory event I'd like to think it's celebratory because it celebrates a commitment to humanising the priesthood. If that sometimes sounds like feminising the priesthood, well, people need to be challenged to define their terms, I think. Sometimes when people talk about feminising this or that context, unfortunately what they do mean is humanising it, or de-bureaucratising it, or something like that. And that tells a rather grim story doesn't it?

But what I feel celebratory about at the end of this day is exactly the way in which the conversations, the questions, the presentations, have drawn us into thinking about what it is for a priesthood at an episcopate to be human.

So I think that's probably what I have to say this afternoon. And I just encourage you, in conclusion, to say this. I think the steering group will want to find a way of getting it together. Say this to us, the bishops, and to others. And above all try and hang on to that sense, that in arguing for and working for the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry of the church, what we're after is not simply justice, though that's not exactly insignificant, but we are after the humanising of the ordained ministry and all that that might mean in terms of mission and the health of Christ's body.