

# **Women Bishops in the Church of England Carlisle DEF Summary Paper**

## **Recent History**

### ***November 1992***

The General Synod voted to ordain women as priests in the Church of England. Women now account for 16% of all full-time diocesan clergy. Since then Synod has twice debated motions on the issue of women bishops.

### ***1993 Bonds of Peace***

This House of Bishops report suggested 'that the issue of whether or not the 1992 decision to ordain women priests was right is one that is subject to a continuing process of discussion and discernment, and also that this process will continue not just until the Church of England but the 'whole church' comes to a common mind about the matter.' 3.6.16]

### ***July 2000***

The General Synod debated a private members motion moved by Ven. Judith Rose, Archdeacon of Tonbridge, and called for further theological study in preparation for the debate on women in the episcopate. This resulted in the Rochester Report.

### ***2004 The Rochester Report***

The Rochester Report deals more thoroughly with the theological questions relating to ministry and episcopacy than many other reports. Of 'The significance of the Bible' it states that the Church of England insists on the authority of the Bible as the norm for Christian theology "In terms of the debate about women bishops this means learning to see how this debate fits into the overall Biblical story about women, men, and the relationship between them, and the deciding whether in terms of that story ordaining women as bishops would be an act of obedience or disobedience by the Church. Would it be consonant with the overall biblical picture or would it not?" (3.2.16)

There is a recognition that the text must be the control for making decisions (determining the original meaning in its context before asking how we translate what is said to our contemporary situation) and also that the diversity of perspectives in the Bible must be considered. This will mean wrestling with 'the uncomfortable and difficult texts that it contains and not skating around them.' (3.3.14). 'Reading scriptures responsibly means asking whether applying the trajectory of the Biblical narrative seriously leads us to go beyond the explicit

teaching of the Bible itself in order to follow through that trajectory in our own historical situation.’ (3.3.17)

As far as tradition and reason is concerned, Rochester comments that this is ‘not a three-legged stool – the norm for Anglican theology is the revelation of God in Holy Scripture’ (3.4.1); tradition and reason help. Tradition is held to be diverse (handed on through the whole life of the church) and dynamic (adapting to new situations). It must be taken seriously. Reason, described as ‘the capacity of rational thought given by God to human beings’ has two limitations: it is contingent (and therefore changeable) shaped by the patterns of thought of that culture, and it is fallen.

The Rochester commission suggests development of doctrine is only permissible if:

- It is Biblically based.
- It takes tradition seriously
- It takes reason seriously

### ***July 2005 Women in the Episcopate: the Guildford Report***

Following the Rochester Report debate, Synod ‘invited the House of Bishops, in consultation with the Archbishops’ Council, to complete by January 2006, and report to Synod, the assessment which it is making of the various options for achieving the ordination of women to the episcopate, and ask that it give specific attention to the issues of canonical obedience and the universal validity of orders throughout the Church of England as it would affect clergy and laity who cannot accept the ordination of women to the episcopate on theological grounds.’

### **The Guildford Group Recommendation**

Five options were suggested by the Rochester Report, three of which were discussed by the Guildford Group. These were:

- Simple, single clause legislation
- Extended Episcopal oversight
- A Third Province

Having reviewed the options, the Guildford group are recommending Transferred Episcopal Arrangements (TEA). Under this system parishes opposed to women priests and women bishops could opt to come under an arrangement whereby a Provincial Regional Bishop exercised pastoral and sacramental functions (on behalf of the Archbishop of the Province), while otherwise remaining part of the geographical diocese in which they were situated.

*TEA would involve the following:*

- Repeal of the 1993 Measure and the Act of Synod (with resolutions A,B and C no longer having legal status). This would have the consequence of abolishing discrimination against women in all parishes outside TEA, though the precise balance within TEA between what is included in a Measure and what is covered by a Code of Practice would be a matter for further discussion and debate during the preparation and consideration of draft legislation.
- Equal opportunities in every post except where parishes have resolved otherwise on grounds of conviction related to women in the priesthood and the episcopate
- The option to chose immediate TEA or in the event of the appointment of a female Diocesan. Parishes that have passed one of the existing resolutions or petitioned for extended episcopal ministry should be free to change their mind at any time

#### *Other Considerations*

- There would need to be transitional arrangements under which any resolutions either lapsed after a set number of years as provided in the legislation or lapsed at a date as Synod may subsequently determine. There is a judgement as to whether this transitional period should be relatively short – say three years - or much longer.
- The post of Archbishop of Canterbury is in a unique category (as an instrument of unity across the Anglican communion)

### **Theological Issues**

Whilst evangelicals may be divided on this issue, the constituency as a whole need to think through a number of concerns:

#### *Headship*

The Biblical debate has largely revolved around the texts in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, both of which are related to headship and the created order. The decision to ordain women to the episcopate inevitably broadens and complicates the debate in that an incumbent who agrees to share the cure of souls in his charge with his bishop could find he has to do so with a woman whose ministry he feels does not have a Biblical mandate. The implications of the decision are therefore in a different category to the 1992 decision, although a direct consequence of it.

#### *Reception*

The 1993 report suggest the decision to ordain women priests is still subject to a continuing process of discussion and discernment in that the 'whole church' has not yet come to a common mind about the matter. This would suggest that the Church of England is embarking on a decision-making process about the

ordination of women to the episcopate before it has resolved the decision about whether it is appropriate to ordain women to the presbyterate.

### *Primary/secondary issues*

Some evangelicals place this debate in the category of a secondary issue in that those who advocate the ministry of women in the presbyterate are not denying the saving grace of God. It is therefore not a primary issue of salvation. Others hesitate to make the primary/secondary distinction since all scripture is God-breathed and freedom of conscience should only be enjoyed where scripture is silent. Until recent decades, the Church of England spoke as one mind on this matter and would not accept the ministry of women in the episcopate.

### **Practical Issues**

The House of Bishops will be discussing the report in June 2006, in preparation for the July Synod. The evangelical voice need to be heard. Gentle and gracious representation needs to be made to the Bishops and our Synod representatives. Above all, we must pray, longing only for God's truth to be preserved and God's gospel to be proclaimed.

### **Other reading**

#### *A Way Forward*

Provision for dissidents after the consecration of women Bishops in the Church of England  
Orthos 22 (Fellowship of Word and Spirit)

#### *Is it time for Women Bishops in the Church of England?*

North West Partnership leaflet available on-line [www.northwestpartnership.com](http://www.northwestpartnership.com)