

The Twenty-first

ERIC SYMES ABBOTT

Memorial Lecture

delivered by

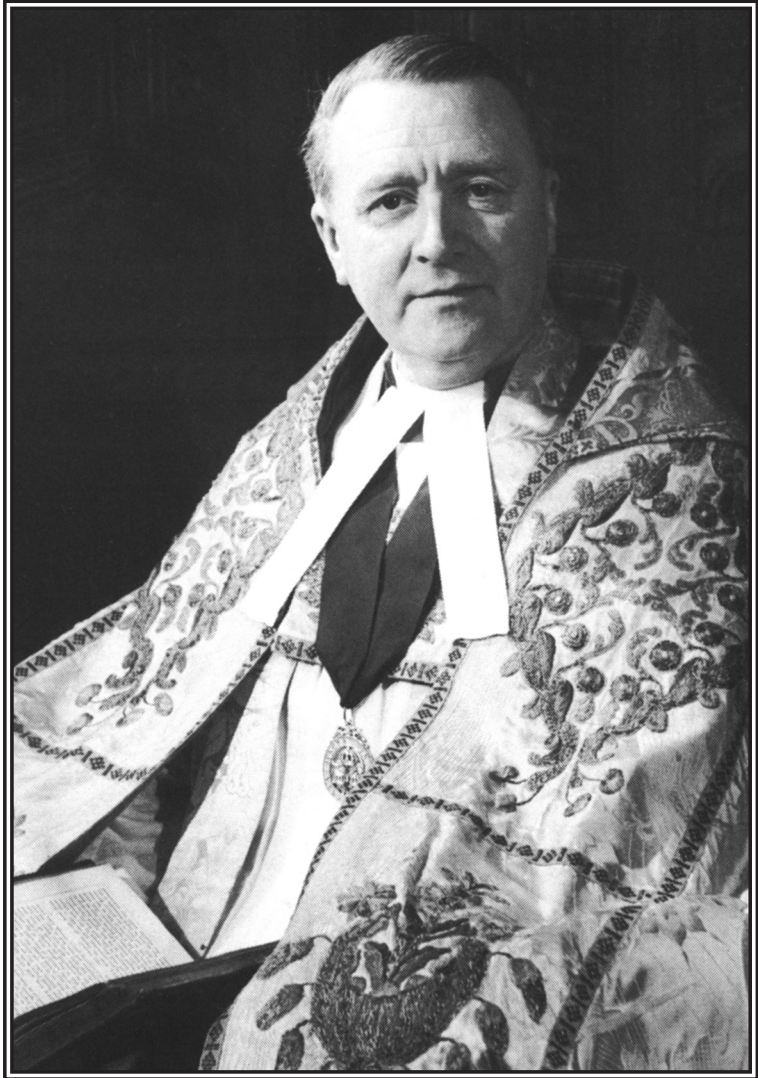
The Very Reverend Vivienne Faull
Dean of Leicester

at Westminster Abbey

on Thursday 11 May 2006
and subsequently at Keble College, Oxford

A NEW SONG IN A STRANGE LAND

*The contribution of women to the priestly ministry of
the Church*



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A NEW SONG IN A STRANGE LAND

The contribution of women to the priestly ministry of the Church

I am sad to say that I never met Eric Abbott, and unlike others in this lecture series of recent years, I can't claim to have been part of his sphere of influence, except, when I read his epitaph "*Friend and Counsellor of many, he loved the Church of England striving to make this House of Kings a place of pilgrimage and prayer for all peoples. Pastor Pastorum*" I am made aware that I benefit greatly from his vision of what the Abbey, and what, by association, cathedrals, can be. He was one of a generation of Deans who opened cathedrals and great churches up enabling them to become places which, in our fragmenting world, are still able to establish and offer Common Ground.

Not that Deans or their institutions are always valued. The Leicester Cathedral chaplain, when he held a joint appointment with the large Further Education College in the city, was wont to tease me saying 'I work in an institution with a defined purpose, clear values of inclusiveness and respect, and which recognises the spiritual needs of all those who enter its doors. And I also work for Leicester Cathedral'.

At that point I would have gladly responded with Eric Abbott's invitation to prayer:

We are all persons in the making
And in a real sense we are
Making and re-making one another.
But how often personal relationships are marred by hasty partial
Or over-severe judgements¹

¹ *Invitations to Prayer: Selections from the writings of Eric Symes Abbott; Dean of Westminster, Cincinnati USA* p 27

I want to talk not just about being persons in the making, but having a ministry in the making as part of a church in the making. I chose the title for today, with its hint of exile. The publicity department at Westminster Abbey greatly enriched the theme by using a depiction of Ruth. Ruth was an extraordinary woman whose story is wonderfully told in the Hebrew scriptures. In her astonishing vow to Naomi after both had been widowed, Ruth committed herself to travel with another woman, her mother in law, in a world where commitment to a woman conferred no advantage, she a Moabitess committed herself to an Israelite, Ruth, a pagan, committed herself to a Jew. It is a fascinating record of the crossing of boundaries of age, race and religion.

Twelve years ago (for me exactly twelve years ago), the Church of England crossed a significant boundary. Since then women have been able to make their vows as priests in the Church of England. They committed their lives to the Church. How have they and the church been getting along? How far have they travelled in their journey together? That is what this lecture tries to test out. I hope it helps to build a clearer picture of a ministry in the making, for a church in the making.

Firstly, what is the numerical contribution that women make to the priesthood of the Church of England?

Since the Church of England doesn't keep detailed records of clergy deployment, I am indebted to two pieces of statistical work which have documented women's presence in the priestly ministry. Canon Cynthia Dowdle, Chair of the National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry (NADAWM) working with the Church and Society Unit in the Diocese of Liverpool, analysed the Statistics of Licensed Ministers, 2002, published by Church House. This was supplemented by a survey of National Advisers in Spring 2004.

Meanwhile Ian Shield, in a labour of love, has also, since 1993/4 scrutinised the pages of Crockford's and the Church Times Appointments columns to report on the deployment of women clergy in the Church of England².

Their conclusions, while not identical (the statistical snapshots were taken at slightly different times and make slightly different assumptions), show very similar trends.

1. The number of women priests has increased both in numerical and percentage terms. The NADAWM report calculates that the total number of women clergy in 2002 was 2,539, 20% of total clergy numbers for that year. Shield, looking at the figures two years later, comments that the Church of England is widely quoted as having 2000 women priests. He concludes that the number is now nearly 3000.
2. The percentage of women being ordained each year is increasing. In 1995, the first year in which men and women were ordained together, Shield calculates that 144 women and 314 men were priested. In 2005 260 women and 264 men were priested³, and parity has been reached.

There are, however, significant differences in the numbers of women in the various categories of ministry and the different roles into which they have been called. I begin with those areas where women are proportionally overrepresented:

3. The majority of Ordained Local Ministers are women; 47% of the total in 2002.
4. The majority of non-stipendiary ministers are women; 43.7% in 2002.
5. In 2004, 36.9% of Health Service Chaplains were female, 26.6% of Prison Chaplains and 26.2% of Higher and Further Education Chaplaincies.

² *Marking out a Base-Line; Opening Season (1994); On Court (1996); First Set (2004); Full Dozen (2005)* Ian Shield. 13 Duke Street, Penn Fields, Wolverhampton WV3 7DT

³ Shield, *Full Dozen*

6. In 2002, 13.88% of stipendiary clergy were women according to NADAWM. Shield puts the figure 0.18% lower. He calculates the 2004 figure at 15.8%.
7. Shield recorded 54 women licensed as Rural or Area Deans in 2003 and 68 in 2005. The total number of these posts was 697 in 2004.
8. Shield reports the eighth diocese to appoint a woman as Archdeacon (Exeter, 2006), 14 women Cathedral Residentiary Canons (excluding the appointment of Jane Hedges to Westminster), and two women Deans.
9. And, to make the inevitable point, there are no women Bishops.

Interpreting these statistics tempts us into assumptions which may be unwarranted, but it is notable that women are particularly represented in roles which are local, flexible, family friendly, voluntary, junior, and of recent creation. Women are much less represented in stipendiary, senior roles or ancient institutions. How the culture of the church and the expectations of women in ministry interrelate has not as far as I know been researched in detail, but it is noteworthy that there is a high proportion of women ministering as chaplains in institutions where sex discrimination is unlawful.

Both NADAWM and Shield comment on the significance of regional and diocesan variation in their statistics. There are generally fewer women clergy in senior positions in the Northern province: no women Archdeacons or Deans, though there are now five women Residentiary Canons. The variations between dioceses is perhaps more startling. Ian Shield has compiled a series of league tables of percentages of women amongst both stipendiary and all licensed clergy in mainland English dioceses. Bottom of the 2004 Shield table for stipendiary ministry is Chichester with 4.1%, then improving to Blackburn (8.3%), and Winchester (9.8%). The top three are third Leicester (21.0%); Hereford (22.5%) and St Alban's (23.4%). Bottom of the Shield table for all licensed clergy are, again Chichester (10.6%), Blackburn (13.0%) and then Exeter (13.1%). In the top three places of this table are Oxford and Salisbury (equal third with 30.0%), St Alban's second (30.3%) and Hereford top (31.4%). Ian Shield

comments on the trend: ‘What is perhaps of more significance than ranking is the rise in percentage among both categories in almost every diocese compared with 2002. Where in 2003 there were 15 dioceses with more than 15% of women stipendiaries, two years later there were double that number; the same is true for dioceses with 25% or more of licensed women clergy, a rise from 6 in 2003 to 13 at the end of 2005.’⁴

There is clearly significant variation in what might be regarded crudely as the appointability of women priests by those who have the power of patronage (or the power of veto) in dioceses. This variation is again the consequence of the interplay of a range of forces: the history of women’s ministry, advocacy for women’s ministry by the diocesan leadership team, the reputation of the current diocesan leadership, as well as more general local cultural and social factors. There is an interesting comparison to be made with what might be regarded as women priests’ acceptability in parishes. Since 1993 parishes have had the right to pass resolutions and petitions which restrict the role of women priests in the parish. There are ten dioceses where more than 10% of parishes have passed one or more resolutions. The top five are Blackburn (32.7%), Sheffield (21.4%), London (17.9%), Manchester (16.4%) and Durham (16.1%). A noticeable Northern bias. The recent House of Bishops’ Women Bishops Group Report⁵ noted ‘Interestingly it is by and large the more rural dioceses which are most open to the ministry of women. There are eleven dioceses where fewer than 5% have passed one or other motion: Oxford, Salisbury, Winchester, Guildford, Sodor and Man, Bath and Wells, Norwich, Ely, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Worcester, and Hereford. In Hereford just two parishes (0.6%) have passed resolutions A and B’.⁶ To sum up: if women’s priesthood is least accepted in Chichester and Blackburn, it is almost universally accepted in Hereford.

⁴ Shield, *Full Dozen*, commentary

⁵ The Guildford Report, GS 1605

⁶ GS 1605 Para 82

Finally Ian Shield has undertaken an interesting statistical study of the preferment paths of two particular cohorts, those ordained deacon in 1988 (when 604 women and men first began diaconal ministry together) and 1993 (when all 500 deacons that year would be eligible for priesting the following year). Well over half of the men ordained deacon in 1988 are now incumbents, compared with only a quarter of the women (though when posts of incumbency status are included the comparison is 70% and 53%). In the 1993 group 45% of the men are incumbents, compared with only 18% of women (including incumbency status posts brings the men up to 67% and the women to 45%). As women are more likely to be non-stipendiary, and few non-stipendiaries have so far been appointed incumbents, there is an obvious explanation for the apparent systemic bias against women incumbents.

Secondly, can we say anything yet about the qualitative contribution of women to the priesthood of the Church of England?

It is still early days, but some things could be said from the start: the most obvious attribute which women bring to priesthood is that of being human. That is important. Wherever women are not ordained into Holy Orders there is a sense that women are somehow less capable of imaging the divine than men, and for Christianity that has meant less human. Whether they were despised as ‘carnal’ or exalted as ‘inspirational’ they were no longer treated as though they were fully human people, made in the image of God.

So, for instance, for centuries women were denied the right to vote because woman was held to be an inferior form of man. In the birth of children women were held to be passive, since they were thought to provide the physical matter from which the embryo develops, while the man provided the active form and movement. Medieval scholars gave the impression that they conceived of the woman’s womb as a sort of pressure

cooker, from which males emerge well cooked, firm and richly textured. Females were underdone, soft, emotional and leaky.

Being weak and vulnerable, prone to tears, women needed strong male protections and were treated in law as property, not the equals of men. Having little moral sense they needed men to put them in the right direction. Their creation out of the side of man meant they shared an image of God through man. Milton summed it all up in the line 'He for God only. She for God in him'.

The Bible is ambiguous about women in society, not only because it is the product of a particular culture, but also because it is interpreted by people formed and sustained by a particular tradition. The long and painful struggle to secure an equal place for women in the church is a struggle only made possible because scientific knowledge about human biology, cultural and social change, together with new ways of looking at religious tradition and experience, have all combined to allow the Church of England to move on. Only now have submerged traditions emerged and gained sufficient buoyancy.

That is why the priesting of women was and is so significant. It proclaims that women are people too. 1994 marked an end to that strand in Church of England tradition which regarded woman as an inferior form of man, a tradition which has been dominant in the Christian church, and in society, for many years. Or at least it should have marked the end.

And there is certainly evidence of that shift having established itself in the culture of our nation. Women are now accepted more and more as representative people, able to stand for men as well as women. A year or so ago I found myself at one of the many local Civic occasions at which the Dean is on parade. She was alongside the Lord

Lieutenant, a woman, the Lord Mayor, a woman, the Chairman of the County Council, a woman, the High Sheriff, a woman, and the Bishop.

And the significance of the shift is felt not just about women, but in more subtle and general ways. At the recent General Synod debate on the legal framework to enable women to be consecrated bishop, three of the major contributions supporting the inclusion of women in the episcopate came from those whom some would label as seriously disabled. One of those speakers, a young woman priest from the Diocese of Derby, Katie Tupling, noted ‘Fifty years ago, my presence here as a priest was unthinkable, according to scripture, tradition and reason. Not due to my gender ... I have my prop with me (prop in two ways) [*she waved her crutch*] ... Disability was a barrier to many things in life, socially and culturally, and according to the Old Testament we who are priests should be without physical defect or illness. Anything we touch becomes void, especially the sacrament.’⁷ The support of three disabled speakers for the move to enable women to be Bishops indicated to me that the inclusion of women in Holy Orders had made significant shifts in people’s understanding of normative humanity, and with that shift had come a new and welcome understanding of human diversity.

But beyond the anecdotal, what is the evidence of the impact of women priests?

Ian Jones, in his major and extensive research project on Women and Priesthood⁸ tried to come to an assessment. In 1992, as he reports, there had been ‘great hopes that women’s ordination would signal a shift away from patriarchy, that a theological wrong would be righted, and the church would be returned closer to the biblical vision of the kingdom of God in which there was no longer Jew and Greek, slave and free,

⁷ GS debate on GS 1605 and 1605A Thursday 9 February 2006

⁸ I Jones, *Women and Priesthood in the Church of England, Ten Years on*, Lincoln Theological Institute, CHP 2004

male and female'.⁹ There were hopes that women would enable new ways of being church to emerge, that they would embody a new style of being priests, and they would offer pastoral care to those who had previously not found it within the church, particularly the abused.

So what did Ian Jones discover? He noted, as we have seen, that the experience of women's ministry was still patchy, and the impact of the 1992 decision was therefore still being worked out. A large majority of respondents believed that the opening of the priesthood to women had been beneficial. In many cases women had been readily accepted because their ministry 'appeared strikingly similar to the kind of ministry long provided by men'.¹⁰ This is both reassuring for those in 1992 who hoped that women would be readily accepted, and worrying for those who had hopes women priests would bring about a profound change in the church's mission and ministry.

Why is it that women priests have apparently had relatively little impact on the lives of individuals and communities? I have a couple of suggestions.

Firstly, prior to the admission of women to the priesthood, a change had already occurred in how men perceived and exercised their ministries. I was a student at St John's College Nottingham in the late 1970s, then strongly influenced by the charismatic movement and training the largest number of ordinands in England. St John's encouraged its students to undertake specialist training in two areas: spirituality, including spiritual direction, and pastoral studies, including counselling. The emphasis was on relational, holistic ministry exercised in partnership between lay and ordained. Men were gaining strengths which had previously been seen as feminine and by the 1990s these were well established in parish life

⁹ Jones p 82

¹⁰ Jones p 101

Second, women priests were faced with a dilemma in 1994. Helen Thorne, who surveyed the first women's journey to priesthood, put it succinctly, observing that we had to prove simultaneously that our ordination had benefited the church while demonstrating that our presence had not fostered radical change.¹¹

I certainly discovered that radical, down to the roots, change had not occurred during the long months of writing the Rochester Report on the Theology of Women in the Episcopate¹². The two genders were equally represented as members of the commission, but the addition of support staff, consultants and ecumenical observers, all men, meant that women were reduced to a minority. In the earliest meetings the women, who were not of one mind on the consecration of women, tried to question some of the assumptions which were being made about theological method. We hoped that the commission might at least allow for something future orientated, eschatological in its ecclesiological thinking. We lost that argument very early, and for the last few meetings the women (who included a professor of theology and the Principal of a Theological College) retreated to the far end of the table, playing out our sense of marginalisation.

As I have tried to analyse the behaviour of groups such as the Rochester commission, I have been helped by Geert Hofstede's¹³ use of the classification of masculinity and femininity to define national cultures. In feminine culture the dominant values are caring for others and preservation. People work in order to live. The Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands top the table for femininity. In masculine cultures the dominant values are material success and progress. People live in order to work. Japan tops this table with the USA closely behind.

¹¹ H Thorne. *Journey to priesthood, An in-depth study of the first women priests in the church of England*, University of Bristol 2000 p134

¹² *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* GS 1557 CHP 2004

¹³ G Hofstede. *Culture's Consequences: comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions and Organisations across nations*, Sage, London, 2003

In leadership terms, masculine and feminine cultures create different role models. The masculine leader is assertive and decisive. He or she is a lonely decision-maker who looks for facts discretely rather than engaging with others in dialogue to find the solution to a problem. The leader in a feminine culture, whether male or female, is less visible, intuitive rather than decisive, and is accustomed to seeking the views of others.

The UK is defined as a relatively masculine culture, featuring joint 9th in Hofstede's list of more than fifty countries. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the leadership of the Church of England has a masculine culture. But I suspect that parochially, a feminine culture prevails. In other words a cultural split runs across the middle of the Church of England, somewhere, I would argue, around the level of incumbency of a medium sized parish. Just to put it in terms of dress (a typical thing you may say for a women to do, but clothes are the way by which I, as a woman, think myself into a role), in the parish I would wear a fleece. In the Bishop's staff meeting I wear a suit. And I can shift from one culture to another, as can many men. But what I have begun to realise after six years of leadership of an English cathedral is that left to form culture for my own institution, I do so in ways which are more feminine than masculine. I am ambitious, for my cathedral, rather than for myself. I am decisive, and believe profoundly in corporate decision making, in the wisdom of crowds. I am competitive, and I thrive on partnership working. So do several of my male Decanal colleagues, but not all, and mine isn't the normative leadership style in the Church of England. It is still a risk to say this, but I believe women do bring something different to leadership. I have joined a boy's club, the Conference of Deans, but I am not an old boy, I can't be, and I suspect the boys don't want me to be.

John V Taylor, in an address to the General Synod on 3 July 1975 articulated this at the level of theological anthropology:

‘Both the difference and the complementarity of male and female lie far deeper than function ... Men and women are different to the tiniest particles of their being. They are different even when they sit side by side at a concert or when they try to comfort a friend. The contribution of both the complementary elements of human nature is in all functions, just as both male and female each in its distinctiveness must contribute to that holiest of all functions, the procreation of life.’

There is risk in articulating a theology of gender difference, and I do so fully aware of the potential for stereotyping and negative projection onto women. The assertion of difference can so easily be shifted into assumptions about women as inferior at best, and impure, and dangerous at worst. But if women are to be freed to contribute fully to the culture of the church (as they do increasingly to the wider culture of the nation) the challenge for men in leadership is to share the power, and their assumptions about how power operates. The challenge for women is to have the confidence to offer their giftedness in leadership.

Thirdly, what about the reception of women who are priests?

In the nation there is a sense that women priests are regarded as both welcome, and normal. We are grateful to Andy Reed, Member of Parliament for Loughborough, who led the short debate on the House of Commons on 21 March, welcoming women priests and urging the House of Bishops to prepare legislation to enable women to become Bishops.

But it can feel less affirming at home. The author and church critic Monica Furlong headed one of the last sections of her last book¹⁴ *On not celebrating women*. It was provocative, as we had come to expect, but accurate.

¹⁴ Monica Furlong, *C of E: The State it's In* Hodder and Stoughton 2000

The legislative framework of the 1992 legislation to admit women to the priesthood includes provision for parishes which could not in conscience accept the ministry of women priests. The Act of Synod, which was added to the legislative framework a year later, made provision for pastoral care and sacramental ministry to be provided by Provincial Episcopal Visitors to parishes which could not accept the sacramental ministry of their diocesan bishop because he had ordained women. This legislative discrimination is permissible because of the, albeit partial, opt out for faith communities from Sex Discrimination legislation.

Behind the legislative framework is the recognition that innovations have to go through a gradual process of acceptance, or of Reception by a church. There is a pun at the heart of the question I have raised. It was the 1988 House of Bishops Report on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood which first introduced the theological concept to the debate. It comes from Roman Catholicism where Reception refers primarily to the assimilation and acceptance of teachings from the Magisterium. In more general ecumenical dialogue the process is an active one as churches decide whether or not to receive from one another's teachings. A significant shift took place when the concept was introduced into the Church of England's discussions on women priests, when the House of Bishops articulated an 'open process of Reception'. The House acknowledged that declaring an open process was problematic when it concerned sacramental ministry, because it would bring with it impaired communion. In other words the House was prepared to introduce the concept of sacramental doubt, which seems an oddly cavalier way to treat both the 39 Articles and the Lambeth Quadrilateral agreements on the sacraments.

This 'open process' was enshrined in the ordination of women legislation. The first legislative draft included a time limit on the provisions of 20 years. The time limit was removed in the course of debate, though it is perhaps significant that the Secretary General's notional current time scale for the consecration of the first woman bishops is

about 20 years from the Promulgation of the legislation on women priests. By omitting a time limit, the Church of England also omitted any process to enable the change to be formally received. By contrast, the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches are absolutely clear about their process of Reception. Indeed, an open process of Reception of a sacramental ministry would, for either of those churches, be unacceptable.

The result of the introduction of an open process into the Church of England has resulted in considerable confusion. Some understand it to mean a period of time for those who can't currently accept the decision to come to terms with it (though it is not clear whether the 'coming to terms' process refers to those within the Church of England, or those within the whole church of God. Which might take a little longer). Others believe it means that the decision could be reversed (women priests would remain priests, but no more would be ordained, as of course happened between the ordination of Li Tim Oi in 1944 and the 1971 Hong Kong ordinations). Ian Jones reports that his research showed that there was little common agreement between clergy about what 'Reception might actually mean', 15% of his sample thought that women's priesting might be reversible. 37% thought that the concept of Reception has 'no useful meaning whatsoever'¹⁵.

And it is women who are priests who live with the ambiguity.

In a speech written by the Dean of Durham for the February 2006 Synod, but which he was not called to give, Michael Sadgrove reflected from Durham:

'In the floor at the west end of Durham Cathedral just in front of the font there is a line of black Frosterly marble running right across the nave. This was the line that women were not permitted to cross in the middle ages. They were confined to the west of it.

¹⁵¹⁵ Jones op cit p 174

‘This line inevitably attracted its own mythology. It was popularly assumed that it was due to St Cuthbert’s dislike of women, and that the misogynist saint did not want women anywhere near his shrine behind the high altar. This is nonsense, as anyone who has read Bede’s lives of Cuthbert knows. The fact of the matter is quite straightforward. In a male Benedictine monastery, which Durham was, women were forbidden to worship in the principal spaces of the monastic church which was the preserve of the monks. Instead, women could worship in the Galilee Chapel at the west end, the Lady Chapel.

‘When I lead pilgrimages in the cathedral, I often stop at the line and invite people to think about the walls of partition that still exist in our world: divisions due to religious difference, ethnicity, privilege, gender, sexual orientation. And I invite them to think too about the differences that still exist in our church.

‘Recently, a woman priest was in a group. She straddled the line with both feet and said: ‘this is where we are as Church of England in relation to women in the priesthood. We are only part way across. We still have one foot on each side. We are nowhere near the end of this journey.’ I couldn’t argue with her’.¹⁶

Note that the woman priest said ‘Church of England’. Many women feel their parishes and dioceses are supportive places to minister, but there is still a sense that the Church of England as Institution seems to be ambivalent about women’s priestly ministry.

But the open process of Reception continues, and the Church has now begun to debate the consecration of women bishops, and had to add another layer of complexity in order to preserve within the church equivalent theological space for those who hold differing views on both women in the priesthood and women in the episcopate.

¹⁶ M Sadgove, private correspondence

The current proposals for the legislative framework for the consecration of Bishops as presented to the Synod in February by the Bishop of Guildford, and currently being revised by the Bishops of Guildford and Gloucester, allow for what has been entitled Transferred Episcopal Arrangements. The provision would allow (whether in any diocese once the legislation was passed, or only in those dioceses where a woman was elected diocesan is unclear) for parishes to transfer their obedience to an alternative bishop appointed by the Archbishop of the Province.

There are two major issues which face the church if we follow this route.

The first is the issue of jurisdiction. If jurisdiction is transferred it introduces real doubts about the significance of territorial boundaries. Several who spoke in the Synod, including two Archdeacons, referred to the difficulty of negotiating pastoral re-organisation, a task which is becoming ever more urgent in response to mission and staffing changes, when there is the possibility of TEA as an opt out. From my perspective as Dean I am not sure, if there were large numbers of parishes in the diocese of Leicester which opted to Transfer out to a Provincial Regional Bishop, about the answers to the following: who would the ordinary be, whom I would install as Bishop, who would be the cathedral Visitor, and whose mission priorities I would I be charged to support?

The second is the issue of permeability. If a candidate is Confirmed by a woman who is a bishop and moves into a parish which has opted for Transferred Authority, would their Confirmation be accepted? If a man was ordained by a woman and moved into a diocese where the ministry of women bishops aren't accepted, would that man's orders be recognised?

Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich, put it straightforwardly to Synod on 7 February¹⁷:

‘Baptismal communion alone is not enough to create or sustain a church. You need the Eucharist with a commonly acknowledged ministry to do that. So a divided episcopate actually creates a divided church. When some Bishops do not recognise those who are in their fellowship as fellow bishops or their sacramental acts, you do not actually have a church any more, you have two churches’.

It seems to me that if women bishops are a theological innovation, TEA is a far greater ecclesiological innovation. Others have noted that we have for some time been very close to articulating theologies specifically rejected by the early church. The post-modern temptation to picking and choosing amongst bishops, the pre-modern temptation to see your bishop as tainted, surely need to be resisted. More prosaically, any diocesan bishop operating under TEA would find much of their energy absorbed by managing its complexity rather than strategic leadership. At a time of rapid change this inhibition could be critical.

I for one would find that inhibition made the office and work of a bishop impossible to perform.

So I do believe that the time has come to back ourselves out of the TEA cul de sac but not, as some have suggested, also to back away from moves to consecrate women as bishops. Rather, I think we have to look again at the underpinning provided by the idea of ‘an open process of Reception’ and the equivocation that surrounds it. I believe that the time has come for the Synod to vote on the Reception of women priests and declare unequivocally that, at the level of the Provinces of Canterbury and York, the orders of women priests are valid. Dioceses would be free to echo that resolution: indeed the Diocese of Southwark has moved in this direction recently, and I am grateful to Canon

¹⁷ Debate on GS 1605

Peggy Jackson, Dean of Women's Ministry for Southwark, for allowing me to use her work today.

Her proposal is for 'a clear statement of diocesan opinion of the validity of women's orders ... not to diminish or ignore the fact of minority opinion, but to accord it proper status: i.e. that of Conscientious Objector. The Church of England did decide to ordain women to priesthood; they are priests, of equal status and deserving equal recognition, to their male counterparts. Those who in conscience cannot accept that fact no longer represent the mind of the church, but they can still be respected by the church for the integrity with which they hold their views, and their fears more effectively addressed.

'The practical operation of pastoral care and Episcopal oversight extended or otherwise, for clergy with Conscientious Objection could continue unchanged, or could even be made more explicitly available, with the reasons clear and visible. But it should be more honestly and openly identified for what it is: the generous accommodation of Conscientious Objection, not a pretence that a decision already made by due legal process was somehow not really made.'¹⁸

I am grateful for this suggestion, and for the detailed policy recommendations which are attached to it. I believe that it is only this sort of small but significant shift of relationships within the church which will allow us to move on, and particularly in due time to enable bishops female and male, to flourish.

Twelve years ago I was ordained priest in Gloucester Cathedral. Thirteen years ago I was married in Gloucester Cathedral. In both liturgies I made vows. Looking back over the years, it has felt that the Church of England was rather like those bridegrooms who can't really commit. It would be very helpful if, at some stage soon, it did.

¹⁸ paper for Bishop's Staff meeting, November 2005

To return to the story of Ruth, who travelled with Naomi to Bethlehem, where the barley harvest was beginning (hence the sheaf in Ruth's arms, a sign of the promise of continuing life). And in Bethlehem Ruth would be found by Boaz, and would found a family, and become the foremother of David and of our Saviour Jesus Christ. But she had to get to Bethlehem first. Women priests, singing a new song, have some way still to travel. In the early 1990s I worked with two archdeacons on what it would mean to admit women to the priesthood. Amongst many other comments, we wrote 'We welcome women into a priesthood we know, which will lead to a wholeness the shape of which we do not know'. Men and women together are a ministry in the making, in a church in the making, and we give thanks for the glimpses we have of the wholeness we sense is ahead of us.

