

**Reform-Awesome Conversations, Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2010, Session One, Reform paper**

It is surely good that Evangelicals who take divergent views on the ordination and consecration of women as presbyters and bishops should remember that they are indeed all Evangelicals, and should resolve to treat each other as such, and not to allow the alliances that they form on the matter in hand (whether with Anglo-Catholics or Liberals) to divert their minds from the fact that their opponents include other Evangelicals, with whom they have even closer bonds than with their allies.

This is the more important because of the false position in which the Church of England has been put by the General Synod. The motion which it passed can be traced back to a letter addressed to the House of Bishops by 40-odd women priests, saying that they wanted women bishops, but would rather not have them if any significant provision were made for their opponents. Worded as it was in terms of self-denial, the majority of the House of Bishops (though without the two Archbishops) decided not to tell them that their terms were unacceptable, and that they consequently could not have women bishops, but to give them what they asked, and to make no provision for their opponents. This was of course entirely contrary to the policy towards dissentients on this matter followed hitherto, and broke formal promises that had been made to them. It was also contrary to an important decision made by the 1998 Lambeth Conference, following the Eames Report, that if a province introduces women priests or women bishops, it shall make proper provision for dissentients, including the provision of like-minded bishops for them (resolution III 2). This 1998 Lambeth resolution, like another more famous one (resolution I 10, on homosexuality), had been previously violated by the Episcopal Church in the USA, and the General Synod thus finds itself following in disreputable American footsteps, away from the consensus of the Anglican Communion.

If, then, all of us in this dialogue are to treat each other as Evangelicals, it appears to be incumbent on the representatives of Reform to concede that another interpretation than their own of the application of biblical teaching to the question of women presbyters and bishops is possible (though they do not agree with it), and incumbent upon the representatives of Awesome to concede that they cannot support the introduction of women bishops (and indeed must oppose it) until proper provisions are made for the consciences of Evangelical and other dissentients.

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To come on, then, to today's main agenda, the teaching of Scripture relating to women presbyters and bishops, we have to see this in the context of the larger question about women's ministry in general, ordained or unordained, and about women's role in the human race, as joint-servants of God with men, but unique in being wives and mothers, sisters and daughters, not husbands and fathers, brothers and sons. They share with men the heritage of having been created by God in the beginning (Genesis 1 and 2), of having rebelled and fallen into sin (Genesis 3), of having been redeemed through the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of Christ and the gift of his Spirit (the New Testament generally), and of awaiting the consummation of redemption, still to come at his second advent (Romans 8,

Revelation 21-22). We all remain creatures of God, dependant on our Maker and Sustainer; we all remain sinners, dependant on our Saviour's mercy and forgiveness; we all rejoice by faith in his redemption already experienced, and by hope in his redemption yet to be fulfilled.

*Part One: Does Scripture teach some form of gender-hierarchy/"male headship" as God's purpose in creation?*

Obviously, this is not the *whole* of God's purpose in creation, but is it *part* of his purpose in creation? This seems hard to deny, from an examination of the account of creation in Genesis 1-2, and especially from a consideration of the use which the New Testament makes of this account.

The New Testament teaches that the woman should be submissive to the man both in the family (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-6), that is, the wife to the husband, and also in the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:7-12, 16; 14:33-36; 1 Timothy 2:8-15), that is, the female church-members to the male, apparently implying that congregational church-leadership properly belongs to men. It is interesting that St. Peter gives this teaching, not simply St Paul, so it can be regarded as general New Testament teaching.

In support of this teaching, the New Testament appeals to the Old Testament. 1 Peter 3:1-6 appeals to Genesis 18:12, where Sarah calls Abraham her 'lord'. 1 Timothy 2:14 appeals to Genesis 3:6, where the woman leads the way in the fall into sin, and has her subordination to the man confirmed as a result (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:34). Rather more frequently, however, appeal is made to the account of creation in Genesis 1-2. 1 Timothy 2:13 appeals to the fact that the man, not the woman, was created first (Genesis 2:18). 1 Corinthians 11:8, 12 appeals to the fact that woman was made from man's side, not independently (Genesis 2:21-23). 1 Corinthians 11:9 appeals to the fact that woman was created to be man's helper, not the other way round (Genesis 2:18, 20). A reading of Genesis 1-2 provides a further piece of evidence to the same effect, not mentioned in the New Testament, which is that the man gives their significant names to all the animals, and also to the woman (Genesis 2:19-23).

*Part Two. Issues of theological hermeneutics.*

A number of issues of theology and hermeneutics are relevant to the subject we have in hand. One, as we have already seen, is the authority and interpretation of the Old Testament. The teaching of the Old Testament retains its reliability and importance for the apostles, just as it did for the Lord Jesus. It is not out of date.

Old Testament teaching on marriage is a case in point. When Jesus is confronted with a question on this, he takes the questioners back to the first marriage in Genesis (Matthew 19:4-8). Incidentally, in doing so he deals with a now current heresy, for the first marriage involved the creation of a woman, not another man, to be the partner of the man (Genesis 2:20-24), and it involved male and female, in order to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27-28).

Secondly, however, the New Testament *develops* the Old Testament message. Where the Old Testament gives us prophecies and types, the New Testament gives us their fulfilment. Where the Old Testament conferred spiritual gifts on the few, the New Testament confers them on the many, and on women as much as on men. Revelation and salvation in the Bible are both progressive. The famous passage Galatians 3:23-29 illustrates this. The passage concerns faith and baptism, the means of salvation, which, with the coming of the Gospel, replace the burdensome discipline of the Law. Union with Christ, which we have now, is as much for Gentiles as for Jews, as much for slaves as for freemen, as much for women as for men. But the passage is not directly concerned with gifts, still less with offices.

Thirdly, the Bible does not treat offices as the only grounds for respect and honour. In the Old Testament, the only regular offices were those of priests, Levites and kings, but God raised up prophets, who had no visible appointment or regular succession, to compensate for their deficiencies. In the New Testament, similarly, alongside apostles, formally appointed by Christ, there are prophets, secretly called by God, who include women (Acts 2:17; 21:9). The only other regular offices in the New Testament are those of presbyter-bishops and deacons. Deacons are an assistant office, as their very name indicates, and the deacons do seem to include women, but there is no trace of women presbyter-bishops, either in the New Testament or in the (orthodox) early Church, which is no doubt significant, since the ancient deacon was not just a presbyter-in-waiting, like the modern one. At the same time, deacons do deserve honour, and so do spiritual gifts (for which women are eligible), age and experience (in women no less than in men), and the role of wife and mother (unique to women). Also unique to women, as has often been pointed out, is the fact that Christ chose them to be the first witnesses to his resurrection, and, according to Mark 16:11-14, rebuked the apostles for not believing their testimony.