

Statement Jan 2011

On Thursday, 6th January 2011, the Bishop of Birkenhead, Keith Sinclair chaired a fourth and, at this stage, final meeting of representatives from AWESOME and Reform, again joined by a number of invited theological consultants. This followed an initial discussion between AWESOME and Reform in 2009 and consultations in January and July 2010, both of which issued joint statements which are on the groups' websites. This final meeting considered women, ministry and ordination in the Pastoral Epistles, comparison between discussion of women and leadership and wider debates on homosexuality, hermeneutical and systematic questions raised by our study of the various texts, and the respective needs and desires of the two groups.

In the light of this and our previous discussions it is clear to us that our ongoing differences are not only in relation to the exegesis of the specific biblical texts where we have focussed our studies. Further areas which have arisen in our conversations and which we believe require ongoing discussion among evangelicals include:

1. The effect on biblical interpretation of different understandings of the relationship between exegesis of specific texts in their original contexts, wider biblical theology, and the role of doctrine and systematic theology
2. The form and significance of creation order in relation to being made male and female, especially as revealed in Genesis 2 and later biblical appeals to it.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity, in particular whether or not language of submission and obedience is to be used for the eternal intra-Trinitarian relationship of the Son to the Father and the significance of any such order within the Trinity for the ordering of relationships between men and women in the church and husband and wife in marriage
4. The relationship between submission and obedience and whether there is a universal Christ-like mutual submission among Christians or a specific submission of wives to husbands whose position as head is to be understood in terms of Christ-like authority

5. The connection between any ordering in relationship between husband and wife and any ordering of men and women within the ministries and offices of the church
6. The nature of episcopal jurisdiction and the provision therefore required for evangelicals opposed to women bishops when women become bishops

Although this particular process has now reached its end, we hope that it will mark the start of wider, ongoing discussion among Anglican evangelicals on the various issues which we have considered together. In order to resource this we will endeavour to make available on both our websites all the papers prepared and discussed at each of the three consultations.

We have become aware how limited dialogue in this area has been among evangelicals for many years and some of the problems of misunderstanding and distrust that have arisen as a result. Despite our sometimes strong disagreements, our conversations in the context of the study of Scripture and prayer have been marked by growing friendship, respect and understanding. We pray these qualities will develop and deepen more widely among evangelicals and within the Church of England as it considers legislation relating to women bishops.

Across our different understandings of Scripture's teaching and divergent views on women presbyters and bishops we reaffirm that we want to recognise each other as fellow evangelicals and Anglicans. We see in each other a genuine desire to understand and be faithful to the Scriptures and their teaching about men and women. We therefore reject the view that our differences are to be explained in terms of either misogyny and cultural conservatism or secular feminism and cultural conformity. We believe evangelicals need to beware and repent of elevating exegetical disagreements in such a way as to deny Christian charity.

In the light of this mutual recognition, and reaffirming our initial commitments to ongoing reflection in a number of areas, we commit ourselves across our varied ministries and across our differences on women presbyters and bishops

- to sustain each other in prayer
- to work for charitable best practice in all our relationships and discussions

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- to recognise and nurture the gifts of all fellow evangelicals, both male and female,.

In particular

(1) We believe that those who hold women presbyters and bishops are developments contrary to Scripture deserve a supported, secure and respected place among evangelicals and in the wider Church of England.

(2) We believe that those who welcome these developments as faithful to Scripture, particularly those women serving in church leadership, deserve a supported, secure and respected place among evangelicals and in the wider Church of England.

We recognise, however, two main challenges in discerning the practical implications of the full implementation of these commitments.

(1) We recognise that evangelicals supporting women presbyters and bishops cannot welcome proposals that deny their conviction that Scripture welcomes and authorises women in all forms of ministry on the same basis as men.

(2) We recognise that evangelicals opposing women presbyters and bishops cannot act in a manner that denies their conviction that Scripture defines women's ministry as distinctive from men's.

As a result, we believe that more work urgently needs to be done in order to understand and address these challenges. We commit ourselves and the various wider networks of which we are part to further reflection and action. We are considering whether and how we may initiate a new stage in our own discussions and we hope CEEC will support the commitments we have made and enable wider consultation and discussion about their implementation.

Convenors:

David Banting – Reform

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