

**Women in the Episcopate**  
**- A digest of the Rochester report**

## **Contents**

**Introduction P.3.**

**1. The origin and nature of episcopacy P.3**

**2. How should we approach the issue of whether women should be ordained as bishops? P.7**

**3. The key arguments for and against the introduction of female bishops in the Church of England P.10**

**4. Arguments about timing P. 15**

**5. Possible pastoral provisions for those unable to accept women bishops P. 16**

## Introduction

Drawing on the material contained in the 2004 ‘Rochester’ report *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* and referred to in paragraphs 17-18 of *Women in the Episcopate – A background note* (A8 (WE) Background), this briefing paper summarises the theological issues that members of diocesan synods will need to know about in order to make an informed decision about the proposal to introduce female bishops into the Church of England. At the end of each section page references are given for the fuller discussion in the Rochester report for the benefit of those who want to look at the issues in more detail.

### 1. The origin and nature of episcopacy

#### a. The origin of the episcopate

Throughout its history the Church of England has had a threefold ordained ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. The precise historical origins of this threefold order continue to be a matter of research and debate amongst New Testament scholars and historians of the Early Church, but there is still good reason to accept the claim made in the Preface to the Ordinal ‘that from the Apostles’ times there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s Church; Bishops, Priests and Deacons.’<sup>1</sup>

It is generally accepted by church historians that from the earliest years of the second century of the Christian era a threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons was the accepted pattern of ministry in Asia Minor at least and that during the course of the second and third centuries it became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the Christian Church as whole. There is also good reason to believe that the existence of the threefold order of ministry in Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century reflects the fact that at the end of the first century the Apostle John appointed bishops in Asia Minor to provide oversight and a focus for unity in the Church in the light of the fact that the Apostles, who had hitherto performed this role, were now dying out.

It can be further argued that the origins of episcopacy can be traced even further back than the ministry of St John. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus we find St Timothy and St Titus, acting as apostolic delegates on behalf of St Paul, exercising what would later be described as episcopal oversight over the churches of Ephesus and Crete, and Patristic tradition specifically calls them bishops. The New Testament also tells us that St James exercised leadership in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17, 15:13-21, 21:18, Gal 1:18-19, 2:9&12) and the second century writers St Clement of Alexandria and St. Hegesippus describe him as the first bishop of Jerusalem.

If St James did exercise an episcopal role in Jerusalem this would take episcopacy back to the very earliest days of the Church. The model provided by the church in Jerusalem may, as Lightfoot suggests, have been followed

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term ‘priests’ is the one that is generally used in the Church of England it is important to note that this is used to refer to the same order of ministry that is referred to by the term ‘presbyter’ in the New Testament and the Early Church.

subsequently when episcopacy was introduced into Asia Minor.

For further detail see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp.9-13

### **b. The role of the bishop in the Early Church**

In the Early Church from the second century onwards a bishop had five basic roles

- The bishop was the chief minister of word and sacrament in the local church.

Originally this would have been a single congregation, and it would have been the bishop who preached, baptised and presided at the Eucharist assisted by his priests and deacons. As the Church grew the bishops gradually became responsible for a number of local congregations each with their own ministers. However, the bishop remained the chief minister of word and sacrament in all these churches and when priests preached or celebrated the sacraments they did so on behalf of the bishop. Deacons likewise continued their ministries as assistants to the bishop.

- The bishop was an instrument of unity in the Church

From the earliest days of the Church its visible unity, and hence its ability to manifest effectively the reconciliation achieved by Christ, has always been under threat. In order to counter this threat it came to be accepted from the early second century onwards that all the clergy and laity in a particular local church needed to be in unity with their bishop and, in particular, to be in Eucharistic communion with him. Subsequently it came to be accepted that in order to counter the danger of disunity between churches all bishops also needed to be in unity with each other. This unity was manifested by their taking counsel together and by the fact that when a bishop was ordained it was the bishops from other churches who performed the ordination, thus admitting the new bishop into the ranks of the single universal episcopate.

- The bishop was the guardian of apostolic tradition

A third key role of the bishop was to safeguard the apostolic teaching against heresy by expounding the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in line with the orthodox 'rule of faith' which had been passed down from the Apostles via the bishops who had succeeded them in their role as leaders of the Church.

In the 'patristic period' (the period of the Greek and Latin Fathers) the bishops exercised their role as guardians of the apostolic tradition in a number of different ways. They taught the apostolic faith and challenged deviations from it through their preaching, their catechetical instruction, and their writings and through meeting together in council to draw up definitions of the true faith in the face of heresy (such as the Nicene Creed).

- The bishop was the minister of ordination

A fourth key role of a bishop in the Early Church was to ordain other bishops and priests and deacons. The fact that bishops ordained and priests did not was seen as one of the major differences between the two orders. As the earliest ordinal we possess, the *Apostolic Tradition*, puts the matter:

For the presbyter has authority only for this one thing, to receive. But he has no authority to give holy orders. Wherefore he does not ordain a man to orders, but by laying on hands at the ordination of a presbyter he only blesses while the bishop ordains. (*The Apostolic Tradition IX:7-8*)

- The bishop was a leader in mission

A fifth key role of the bishop was that of leader in mission. The four roles noted thus far might seem to suggest bishops in the Early Church had a ministry that was exclusively oriented towards those who were already part of the Church. However, throughout that period bishops were constantly engaged in mission to those outside it. A good example of this aspect of the bishop's role is provided by the Venerable Bede's account of the ministry of St. Paulinus, Bishop of York and later Rochester in the seventh century.

Bede tells us that Paulinus was determined:

...to bring the nation to which he was sent the knowledge of the Christian truth, and to fulfil the Apostle's saying, 'to espouse her to one husband, that he might present her as a chaste virgin to Christ'. Therefore, directly he entered the province he began to toil unceasingly not only by God's help to maintain the faith of his companions unimpaired, but if possible to bring some of the heathen to grace and faith by his preaching.

Initially Paulinus' missionary efforts were unfruitful, but after the baptism of the Northumbrian king, Edwin, his people began to turn to Christianity as well:

Indeed, so great was the fervour of faith and the desire for baptism among the Northumbrian people that Paulinus is said to have accompanied the king and the queen to the royal residence at Ad-Gefrin and remained there thirty six days constantly occupied in instructing and baptizing. During this period, he did nothing from dawn to dusk but proclaim Christ's saving message to the people, who gathered from all the surrounding villages and countryside; and when he had instructed them, he washed them in the cleansing waters of baptism in the nearby River Glen. (Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, Bk II Ch.14)

For further detail see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp. 12-24

### **(c) The role of the bishop in the Church of England today**

As *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* notes, a range of understandings of episcopacy has existed in the Church of England since the Reformation and

continues to exist today. However, as it also notes, in spite of this range of understandings it is nonetheless possible to talk about an accepted Church of England position on the role of bishops in the life of the Church.

This position can be found in found in the Ordinal of 1662, the *Common Worship* Ordinal, the Canons, legislation passed by General Synod and embodied in ecclesiastical Measures, and the various ecumenical agreements which the Church of England has entered into and which have been noted above. In addition, attention also has to be paid to the various teaching documents on episcopacy issued by the House of Bishops, most notably *Apostolicity and Succession* and *Bishops in Communion*. Although these latter documents have not been formally endorsed by Synod as representing the teaching of the Church of England the fact that they represent the mind of the House of Bishops does give them a considerable degree of authority.

An examination of this material shows that, in line with the desire to maintain continuity of practice with the Early Church that led the Church of England to retain bishops at the Reformation, the ministry of a bishop in the Church of England today remains in general terms the same ministry as that exercised by bishops in the Early Church.

- A Church of England bishop is the principal minister of word and sacrament of the local church and has overall pastoral responsibility for his clergy and laity. Like a bishop in the Early Church, he exercises his ministry with the assistance of his priests and deacons.
- A Church of England bishop is an instrument of unity for his diocese and for the wider Church. As the 1990 Church of England report *Episcopal Ministry* puts it:

In the local church the bishop focuses and nurtures the unity of his people; in his sharing in the collegiality of bishops the local church is bound together with other local churches; and, through the succession of bishops the local community is related to the Church through the ages. Thus the bishop in his own person in the diocese; and in his collegial relations in the wider church; and through his place in the succession of bishops in their communities in faithfulness to the Gospel, is a sign and focus of the unity of the Church.

- A Church of England bishop is called to declare and uphold the apostolic faith which is revealed in Scripture and to which the Tradition of the Church bears witness.
- As in the Early Church it is bishops who have the sole right to ordain other bishops and priests and deacons.
- Like a bishop in the Early Church a Church of England bishop is called to be a leader in mission.

In the case of a suffragan bishop all these roles are still exercised, but they are exercised under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

As well as continuity there has also been change. The office of bishop adapted to meet changing circumstances during the early centuries of the Christian Church and it has continued to adapt ever since. While the key features of episcopal ministry today are the same as they were in the Early Church the way that this ministry is exercised is different. A bishop today simply does not operate in the same way that a bishop operated in the second century or the sixth century.

For the debate about the ordination of women bishops this raises the issue of whether their ordination would simply be a further adaptation of the episcopal office to meet the circumstances of our time and a changed theological understanding of the relationship between men and women in the Church, or whether it would represent a fundamental break with the historic continuity of the episcopate which the Church of England has hitherto sought to maintain.

A second issue is whether a woman would be able to carry out the role of a bishop in the Church of England. This issue involves theological questions, such as whether it would be right for a woman bishop to exercise episcopal authority over men, and the practical question of whether a woman could effectively exercise an episcopal ministry in circumstances where there would be clergy and congregations who would be unable to accept her ministry.

A third issue is whether any arrangements that might be made to meet the pastoral needs of those unable to accept the ministry of women bishops would be compatible with the accepted role of the bishop in the ecclesiology of the Church of England. For example, if a woman was to be made bishop, but there were clergy and parishes in her diocese that were under the oversight of another bishop because they were opposed to the ordination of women, this would call into question the principle that the diocesan bishop has pastoral oversight over all the clergy and people of the diocese.

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp. 42-65

## **2. How should we approach the issue of whether women should be ordained as bishops?**

As Chapter 4 of *Women Bishops in the Church of England* explains, the ministries open to women in the Church of England have steadily expanded since the first women were made deaconesses in 1861, with the first women deacons being ordained in 1987 and the first women priests being ordained in 1994. In order to address the issue of whether the episcopate should also be open to women we need to tackle the three issues noted at the end of the last section, but before we do this we need to consider first of all whether it would be right in principle for a woman to be a bishop.

If introducing women into the episcopate of the Church of England is a development of the Church's existing doctrine and practice, as such it needs to be assessed according to three general criteria for legitimate developments within the Church.

### **Is this development biblically based?**

The Church of England, in common with the orthodox Christian tradition in general, believes that the Bible witness forms the basis for Christian doctrine and therefore any development that is not grounded in Scripture cannot be permissible. In the words of the Scottish theologian James Orr:

There may be disputes about the authority of Scripture, but there ought to be no dispute about this, that whatever has no place in Scripture, or cannot be legitimately deduced from it, is no part of the truth of revelation for which the Church is set as 'the ground and pillar' [1Tim 3:15]. (James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma*)

In terms of the debate about the ordination of women as bishops this means that the proposal to allow women to be bishops can be seen as legitimate if it:

- Has explicit or implicit support in specific biblical texts;
- Enables us to make coherent sense of the overall biblical picture of the role of women in the purposes of God;
- Takes the logic of the biblical material relating to women and applies it afresh in a new cultural and historical context.

### **Does it take tradition seriously?**

We cannot simply read the biblical text as if there had been no other Christians before us and as if God had not been at work through his Spirit maintaining his Church in truth. God has made us part of a historical community and we have to listen carefully to what God has had to say to us through the other members of that community in the past and act accordingly.

In terms of the debate about whether there should be women bishops this means that a permissible development is one that:

- Shows awareness of what the traditions of the Church (as manifested in the totality of its life) have to tell us about the role of women in general and the role of women in ordained ministry in particular;
- Shows that it has understood the reason(s) for the existence these traditions;
- Builds on the Church's existing traditions rather than simply rejecting them.

For the debate about the ordination of women as bishops, what this means is that it would need to be shown that such a move by the Church of England did have the character of an organic development, building on existing traditions in such a way as to be an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary change.

### **Does it take reason seriously?**

Reason in this context means both the general human capacity for rational thought and the mind of a particular culture. It therefore follows that a legitimate development:

- Is one that can be shown in rational and coherent fashion to be rooted in Scripture and tradition in the ways outlined above;
- Will enable the Church to respond creatively and persuasively to the issues raised by contemporary culture and contemporary Christian experience.

In the case of the debate about the ordination of women bishops, this means that such a development will be one that both builds on Scripture and tradition and also addresses the belief in our society that equal opportunities for women are a moral good, the conviction of some women within the Church of England that they have a vocation to the ordained ministry and responds to the experience of the ministry of women priests in the Church of England over the last decade.

For a development to be viewed as legitimate it will also need to be received by the Church as a whole. Reception does not simply mean the acceptance of a decision that has been made. Rather, it has come to be used in theology to mean that process of discernment whereby the people of God decide whether a decision that has been made has been in accordance with the will of God.

With regard to the ordination of women this means that the Church of England's decision in 1992 to ordain women to the priesthood was not the end of the matter, but the beginning of a process of discernment involving not only the Church of England, but the Church as a whole. As the 1993 House of Bishops report *Bonds of Peace* put it:

The Church of England made its decision to ordain women to the priestly ministry of the Church of God as one part of the Universal Church using its own decision making structures, in consultation with the wider Anglican Communion and in knowledge of the different practices of its ecumenical partners. Discernment of the matter is now to be seen within a much broader and longer process of discernment within the whole Church under the Spirit's guidance.

We now enter a process in which it is desirable that both those in favour and those opposed should be recognised as holding legitimate positions while the whole Church seeks to come to a common mind. The Church of England needs to understand itself as a communion in dialogue, committed to remaining together in the ongoing process of the discernment of truth within the wider fellowship of the Christian Church

The concept of reception raises three issues in respect of the debate about the ordination of women bishops.

- (1) Is it right for a particular church to act on its own? Would it not be better for a church to wait for an ecumenical consensus to exist before introducing a development rather than making the development and then seeing whether the development is eventually received?

- (2) Is it right to proceed with the ordination of women as bishops while the process of reception of the decision to ordain women as priests was still continuing?
- (3) Would a decision to ordain women as bishops in the Church of England mean the end of the process of reception of the ordination of women, or would theological consistency, as well as Resolution III.2 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which called on the churches of the Anglican Communion to uphold the principle of open reception in relation to the ordination of women to the episcopate, mean that any decision to ordain women bishops would also need to be subject to a process of reception?

In the case of the decision to ordain women priests, the recognition that the Church of England was entering into a process of reception about the matter led to provision being made for those unable to accept the decision on the grounds that their position was still accepted as a legitimate one within the Church and that the process of reception involved living with diversity. The question that needs to be considered in relation to the debate about the ordination of women as bishops is whether, in the event of the Church of England deciding to ordain women bishops, similar provision should also be made for those unable to accept this decision and, if so, what form this provision should take.

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp. 66-113.

### **3. The key arguments for and against the introduction of female bishops in the Church of England.**

#### **A. Arguments for introducing female bishops in the Church of England**

(1) There is an overall trajectory in Scripture in which the equality between women and men established by God at creation is disrupted by the Fall, but is then fully restored in the New Testament as a result of the work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is seen in:

- the affirmation of the equality of women and men in Galatians 3:28,
- the way that texts such as Acts 9:36-42, 16:14-15, 18:18-24, Romans 16:1-6, 1 Corinthians 11:5, Philippians 4:2-3 and 2 Timothy 4:9 show women working alongside men in the life and ministry of the Early Church
- the fact that, in the view of many scholars, a woman called Junia is described as an 'apostle' in Romans 16:7 and that ancient tradition also describes Mary Magdalene as 'apostle to the apostles' on the basis of John 20:11-18. This last point is particularly significant because the office of bishop has traditionally been seen as representing the continuation of the ministry of the apostles in the later life of the Church.

(2) The texts traditionally appealed to as ruling out the exercise of authority by women in the Church do not do so.

It is argued that Genesis 1-2 indicate the equality of men and women rather than the subordination of women to men. It is also argued that the two New

Testament texts that use the language of 'headship' with reference to the relationship between men and women, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Ephesians 5:22-23, describe respectively gender differentiation rather than subordination and relations within the home and are therefore irrelevant to the question of whether women can exercise authority within the Church. Finally, it is argued that 1 Corinthians 14:34-38 and 1 Timothy 2:12-15, which have traditionally been seen as prohibiting women from exercising ministry in church in the presence of men, are instructions to particular congregations in specific circumstances and not universally applicable.

### (3) There is evidence for women's ministry in the Early Church

Although it is traditionally been argued that ministry in the Early Church was largely confined to men, it is now argued that this traditional view is based on a selective reading of the evidence and that a re-reading of literary evidence and evidence from inscriptions shows that, as Ute Eisen suggests :

... women were active in the expansion and shaping of the Church in the first centuries: they were apostles, prophets, teachers, presbyters, enrolled widows, deacons, bishops and stewards. They preached the Gospel, they spoke prophetically and in tongues, they went on mission, they prayed, they presided over the Lord's Supper, they broke the bread and gave the cup, they baptized, they taught, they created theology, they were active in the care of the poor and the sick, and they were administrators and managers of burial places. (Ute Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity* )

### (4) Tradition does not rule out the appointment of women as bishops

Three points are made in this connection.

(a) The exclusion of women from the ordained ministry is a departure from the egalitarian teaching and practice of the New Testament and the Early Church.

(b) Tradition is not static but develops and therefore the fact that women have not been ordained in the past is not a valid reason for saying that they cannot be ordained today.

(c) Because the exclusion of women from the threefold ordained ministry has only been challenged comparatively recently, the issue of whether women should be ordained has not yet been decisively considered. This means that the Church cannot yet draw fully on tradition in relation to the role of women in the ministry of the Church, and that it is therefore premature to say that the exclusion of women from the episcopate is part of Tradition.

### (5) Both women and men are needed to represent Christ

It is argued that both women and men are incorporated into Christ by baptism and are thereby given the role of representing him. On this view, it is therefore inappropriate that women are excluded from representing Christ in the ordained ministry and that their exclusion undermines the Church's ability to proclaim the unity of men and women in Christ.

(6) The mission of the Church creates a need for women bishops (the 'missiological argument')

Continuing from the last point it is argued that in our society the ordination of women as bishops is required to give credibility to the proclamation of the gospel. The argument is that the exclusion of women from the episcopate is seen as indicating that women are regarded by the Church as having less value than men. It is argued that this automatically presents a barrier to the Church's message to those in our society who share the prevailing belief that women and men have equal worth and that that they should therefore have the same opportunities in life and employment.

(7) The Church needs the gifts that women have to offer

The argument here is that women have particular gifts to offer to the episcopate, such as, for example, a more inclusive and collaborative approach to ministry, that are complementary to those brought by men and that the Church is missing out if it does not allow these gifts to be exercised.

(8) The Church of England has the right to develop its own orders

It is argued that is that the Church of England has the right to develop its own orders to bring them more in line with its developing theological understanding or to meet new circumstances and this is in fact what took place at the Reformation in faithfulness to Scripture and apostolic tradition. There is therefore no need to wait for universal ecumenical agreement before moving ahead on the issue of women bishops.

(9) The significance of the 1992 decision to ordain women priests

Finally, it is argued that in terms of traditional Anglican Church order the issue of whether women should be ordained as bishops was decided in principle when General Synod voted to ordain women as priests in November 1992. This is because in the Church of England those in priest's orders have always been eligible to be bishops and there is no reason for it to be different in the case of women

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp.156-178

## **B. Arguments against introducing female bishops in the Church of England**

(1) The shortcomings of the missiological argument

Against the missiological argument it is contended that it would be wrong to change Christian tradition simply to accommodate a particular contemporary social grouping or attitude. True evangelization means bringing people to accept the truths proclaimed by the church rather than compromising them.

## (2) This development would be contrary to Scripture and tradition

It is argued that the introduction of women bishops is not consonant with Scriptural passages such as 1 Cor 11:12-16, 14:34-38, 1 Tim 2:11-15, Eph 5:21, Gal 3:27-28 and is unsupported by tradition. It is seen as particularly significant that although Christ associated freely with women and gave equal value to them in a way that was contrary to the social mores of his day nevertheless the leaders he appointed for the Early Church were all male. The fundamental equality of women and men before God in creation does not necessarily imply that all orders of ministry must be open to both sexes. More generally, it is argued that the use of male and female language in the Bible, in the Christian Tradition and in human cultures worldwide point us to the fact that human sexual differentiation is part of the givenness of the human situation as created by God. Seen in this light, there is nothing odd about the existence of sexual differentiation in the life of the Church

It is further argued, particularly by Conservative Evangelicals, that just as there is an order within the life of the Holy Trinity in which God the Son submits to God the Father although they are equal as God, so also from Genesis 2 onwards this pattern of order in God is reflected in a proper order of relations between men and women ('headship') in which women are to submit to men even though they are equal to them as human beings. This principle of 'functional subordination' is not overthrown by Galatians 3:28, which is not a general statement about equality but a statement about the specific issue of who inherits the blessing promised to Abraham, and it is this principle which underlies the restriction on women's ministry in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Giving women authority over men as bishops would contradict this principle even more than the ordination of women priests has already done.

## (3) The maleness of Christ

It is argued that the fact that the incarnate Christ was male was significant: he was the Son of the Father and the Son of David, and that if a priest or bishop has an iconographic function as a representative of Christ, particularly at the celebration of the Eucharist, then he has to be male for the representation to be appropriate. Just as the historical particularity of the Last Supper can only be properly represented by the use of bread and wine, so the historical particularity of the incarnation can only be properly represented by someone who is male. It is also argued that since the time of St Ignatius of Antioch a bishop has been seen as a type or icon of the Fatherhood of God and a female bishop would not be able to do this because she would tend to obscure the fact that God's Fatherhood is paternal rather than maternal in nature.

## (4) The role of the bishop as a focus of unity

As we have seen, one of the key roles of a bishop since earliest times has been to be a focus of unity within the Church. Because a significant number of people within the Church of England would not be able to accept female bishops, a woman bishop would not be able to act as a focus of unity and hence the unity of the Church of England would be undermined. It would be difficult to see how the Church of England could remain one church, theologically

speaking, if there was a situation in which bishops were not recognised by other bishops or by clergy and laity

(5) Sacramental assurance

It is argued that one of the key purposes for the existence of holy orders in the Church is to give assurance that the sacramental acts performed by the Church are truly acts of the Catholic Church and hence of Christ himself. This principle of sacramental assurance has been undermined by the introduction of women as priests in a context where not everyone agrees that women can be priests and would be even more radically undermined by the introduction of women as bishops given that the orders and hence the sacramental ministry of those ordained by them would be in doubt for many within the Church.

(6) The ecumenical question

It is argued that the Church of England is among those churches which have a share in the historic episcopate. The episcopate is not the Church of England's alone, but belongs to the whole Church; therefore it should not be changed without reference to the Church more widely. A consequence of going ahead with the ordination of women as bishops without wider catholic consent will be the further impairment of communion not only with the Roman Catholic Church but also with some other churches of the Anglican Communion and other ecclesial bodies both Eastern and Western (including the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches and Protestant churches such as the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church). To them, it is said, the adoption of a female episcopate in the Church of England would finally signal the reception of an irreconcilable ministry and ecclesiology.

(7) The argument about women's ordination was not decided in 1992

It is argued that a majority vote by the General Synod cannot be regarded as doctrinally decisive because decisions by church councils only have authority if they are consonant with Scripture, which in this instance was not the case. On this view, the 1992 vote was a mistaken decision which the Church of England will sooner or later need to reverse. It is further argued that it would be rash to proceed with the ordination of women as bishops when there is as yet no consensus about the ordination of women today, whether as priests or bishops, either in the Church of England or in the Anglican Communion, and that appointing women as bishops would lead to disunity in the Church of England and make it more difficult for those with different positions over the ordination of women to co-exist with integrity within it

(8) There is a danger of the 'feminization' of the Church of England.

A final argument is that the Church of England needs to retain male leadership if it is to avoid feminisation and reach out successfully to men. As one submission to the Rochester Commission put it:

Men will be driven out of the church if women are too prominent within it and won't be drawn into it if men are too scarce. The growing feminisation of the church has been a problem, many would argue, since

the end of the first-world war. If the Church is going to be at all credible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it needs to have more men at the heart of its leadership – men who value the unique role of women, and seek to uphold it, while at the same time recognising their own unique role as men.

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, pp 137-156

#### 4. Arguments about timing

There are those who believe that this is not the right time to admit women to the episcopate:

- because the decision to ordain women priests is still in a process of reception;
- because there is a lack of scholarly consensus about how to interpret the relevant evidence from the New Testament and the Early Church and the arguments put forward by scholars supporting the ordination of women are still disputed;
- because the lack of consensus about the matter will disrupt the unity of the Church of England and pose problems for its relations with other churches, including the two biggest groups of Christians in the world, the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox.

Others, however, believe it is the right time because:

- the ministry of women has been sufficiently received in the Church of England to make it right to proceed to the ordination of female bishops;
- complete scholarly agreement is something that will never be achieved and there are sufficiently weighty scholarly arguments to make ordaining women bishops a legitimate step to take;
- experience of the ministry of women as priests since 1994 has shown that women would be capable acting as bishops and it would be unjust and a waste of their God given talents not to give them the opportunity to do so;
- delaying a decision will mean a continuing argument that will deflect the Church of England from its primary tasks such as worship and mission and the longer the Church delays the more problematic its current position will become in terms of mission;
- there is agreement within the Anglican Communion that provinces are free to make their own decisions on this matter.
- ordaining women bishops would improve our relationship with churches that already ordain women at all levels of their ministry and dialogue and good ecumenical relations with Rome and the Orthodox would continue even if the Church of England were to ordain female bishops.

In addition a decision by the Church of England to ordain women as bishops would send out a positive signal to those within the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions who are seeking to encourage those traditions to re-consider their current opposition to the ordination of women.

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, chapter 6

### **5. Possible pastoral provision for those unable to accept female bishops**

The range of suggestions that have been made about how to meet the pastoral needs of those opposed to female bishops is as follows:

(1) There should be no specific provision

The arguments for this approach are that it would be discriminatory to insist on specific provisions in the case of female bishops and that female bishops should be trusted to make suitable pastoral arrangements for those opposed.

The arguments against are that this approach would mean that opponents would have no choice but to accept a woman as their bishop even if this created conscientious difficulties for them, thus leaving them with the options of refusing to recognise her authority and breaking Church law, leaving the Church of England or acting in ways they believed to be wrong.

(2) Provision should be made by a female bishop for a male bishop to provide pastoral care and sacramental ministry to opponents on her behalf in accordance with a code of practice.

The arguments in favour of this approach are that a female bishop would retain full episcopal authority and that a code of practice would allow for appropriate local flexibility

The arguments against this approach are that the problem of opponents having to recognise a woman as their bishop would remain, that a bishop acting on behalf of a woman and under her authority would be regarded by opponents as lacking legitimacy as a bishop and that there is a great lack of confidence among opponents that a code of practice would result in their needs being met.

(3) Provision should be made by means of legal provision through the measure for a complementary male bishop to exercise jurisdiction and pastoral and sacramental ministry in a diocese alongside a woman bishop while she retained legal jurisdiction over the diocese as a whole.

The arguments in favour of this approach are that it would allow opponents to come under the jurisdiction of, and receive ministry from, a male bishop who was not acting on behalf of a female bishop (a key principle for many of those unable to accept a woman as a bishop) while still allowing a female bishop to have unimpaired jurisdiction in her diocese

The arguments against this approach are that it would introduce legal discrimination against female bishops in that their ministry would be restricted

in away that was not true of male bishops and that there would be a lack of clarity about the respective spheres of authority of the two bishops concerned.

(4) Provision should be made by means of legal provision through the measure for the authority of women bishops over parishes opposed to the ordination of women to be transferred to an alternative male bishop.

The arguments in favour of this approach are that it would allow opponents to come under the jurisdiction of, and receive ministry from, a male bishop who was not acting on behalf of a female bishop and would avoid the lack of clarity about overlapping spheres of authority in the previous approach.

The arguments against this approach are that it would undermine the principle of Catholic ecclesiology that a bishop should have authority throughout a diocese, that like the previous approach it would discriminate against female bishops and that there would be practical problems about how a parish could be in a diocese but also under a separate jurisdiction.

(5) Provision should be made by means of legal provision through the measure for parishes opposed to the ordination of women to leave their present dioceses and become part of a diocese or province with a male only priestly and episcopal ministry.

The arguments in favour of this approach are that it would provide a clear and guaranteed future for parishes and clergy opposed to the ordination of women, whilst allowing female bishops to exercise unimpaired jurisdiction over the whole of their dioceses.

The arguments against this approach are that it would be complicated and expensive to create such a diocese or province, that the future unity of such a diocese or province would be uncertain given the theological, ecclesiological and liturgical differences between Catholic and Evangelical opponents of women's ordination and that it would cement division by creating a church within a church and evade the challenge to the Church of England to genuinely learn to live with difference over the ordination of women.

(6) Another suggestion is that there should be some kind of restriction of women's episcopal ministry with women being allowed to suffragans but not diocesans or diocesan bishops but not archbishops.

The arguments in favour of this approach are that it would allow for the gradual acceptance of female episcopal ministry and provide more room to make provision for those opposed to women's ordination. The arguments against are that it would continue discrimination against women and only prolong the argument about the exercise of ministry by women.

Apart from the final proposal, which does not seem to have been the subject of synodical discussion since the Rochester report was published, these options have all been considered by the General Synod as the proposal to ordain female bishops has been debated. The details of this discussion are set out in paragraphs 20-42 of *Women in the Episcopate – A background note*

The Measure referred to the dioceses in 2010 combines elements of the second and third approaches. Bishops (male and female) would be required to make provision for a male bishop to provide pastoral care and sacramental ministry to opponents, in accordance with a code of practice to which the diocesan bishop would be legally required to 'have regard'. The male bishop providing such pastoral care and sacramental ministry would not have jurisdiction in his own right but would be acting on behalf of the diocesan bishop.

For further details see *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* pp. 205-227

## **Resources for the debate on women in the Episcopate**

### **1. Three key Church of England texts:**

The Rochester Report - *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* (CHP 2004)

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/womenbishops.pdf>

*Resources for Reflection* (GS Misc 827 2006)

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/july2006/gsmisc/gsmisc827.rtf>

*Women in the Episcopate – An Anglican Roman Catholic Dialogue* (GS Misc 885 2008)

### **2. From the Anglican Communion:**

*Women in the Anglican Episcopate, Theology, Guidelines and Practice* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998)

### **3. Further material on the female bishops debate:**

For female bishops

H Harris and J Shaw (eds), *The Call for Women Bishops* (SPCK 2004)

J Rigney (ed), *Women as Bishops* (Mowbray 2008)

Against female bishops

J Baker, *Consecrated Women? : Women Bishops – A Catholic and Evangelical Response* (Canterbury Press 2003)

The Women's ministry section on the Reform website

<http://www.reform.org.uk/pages/bb/womensministry1.php>

### **4. The two key campaigning websites for and against female bishops**

Women and the Church <http://womenandthechurch.org>

Forward in Faith [www.forwardinfaith.com](http://www.forwardinfaith.com)

**5. For the wider theological debate about the roles of men and women in the Church two American websites that are worth looking at are:**

Christians for Biblical Equality ([www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org))

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood ([www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org))