

‘After July’

Reflections on the forthcoming vote on the Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure



Ordained Women of the Diocese of Salisbury

***With contributions from Jane Charman, Robert Key,
Jane Lloyd, June Osborne and Stella Wood***

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**'After July: what if the Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure does not receive final approval?'
*Ordained Women of the Diocese of Salisbury***

The authors of this article are some of the ordained women of the Diocese of Salisbury. In March 2012 all the ordained women of the Diocese received a letter inviting their reflections on the Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure. The letter asked: what if the Measure does not receive final approval in July? What would this mean for the Church of England and how would you be likely to respond?

My task has been to try and combine the many contributions into a coherent whole. This has meant weaving together a great deal of variegated material including theology, history, biography, testimony and poetry. I have been very aware as I have worked with this material of the immense privilege of being permitted a glimpse into the lives and ministries of so many women colleagues. Women are truly among some of the most gifted, dedicated and inspirational clergy in the Church – a Church which has yet to honour them as they deserve.

In another way too I have been tremendously heartened by what I have read. As a 'veteran' of this debate I am not often surprised these days by anything new, yet what women have chosen to say and the 'tone' or 'voice' in which they have said it has added significantly to my understanding of this issue and how it is perceived and experienced by those who are most directly affected by it. This seems to me worth sharing and my prayer is that this offering from the ordained women of Salisbury will in some way assist those who will soon be voting on the Measure and all of us as we seek to live with the consequences of that decision.

It is important to say that not all the women of the Diocese will wish to take personal ownership of each and every opinion and comment in this article. That is part of the dynamic of a corporate response. I take editorial responsibility for the whole and any inaccuracies or infelicities are almost certainly mine.

**Jane Charman
Eastertide 2012**

‘With a Salisbury voice’

The subject of women’s ordained ministry has been discussed and debated over decades, at length, in depth, ‘ad nauseam’. Is there anything more that can possibly be said about it? Yet perhaps there is a need, not for new opinions, but for a different sort of voice to be heard.

The voices we are used to hearing tend to be those of church leaders, synod members and campaigners. Their voices have been eloquent and influential and we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all those who have spoken out boldly and consistently for the full inclusion of women in the life and ministry of the Church. The voices of ordained women, simply getting on with their ministries in the places to which they have been called, have been rather less audible. For many of us there is a reluctance, whether innate or learned, to ‘raise our voices’, even, or perhaps especially, when the issue is something very close and personal to us. Almost all the contributions to this article began with expressions of gratitude for the opportunity to offer something. Some women seemed surprised and touched by the invitation to speak and by the possibility that they might be listened to. They hoped that what they had to say might help even a few people to see some of the issues differently.

So if we are speaking ‘with a Salisbury voice’, what is distinctive about that voice? Much of the Diocese has inherited what might be called a ‘liberal catholic’ tradition. The number of parishes which are unable to accept women’s ordained ministry is small and growing smaller:

‘Within my own, literally, parochial ministry I have only encountered occasional opposition to my being a woman priest; for the most part I sense a support and a welcoming of the varying ministries and giftings that we all offer, regardless of our sex.’

Salisbury is a context in which women’s ministries have largely been accepted and affirmed and our ‘voice’ perhaps reflects this. It is on the whole a moderate and generous voice, not the querulous, strident or confrontational voice of stereotype although frequently suffused with sadness or accented with pain and strong anger. Women who have spent their entire ministries in the Diocese of Salisbury are aware that they have to some extent been sheltered from the storm. Some who have come from other Dioceses testified to the very different experiences they had had there – both in Dioceses where there is a prevailing culture of non-acceptance and in Dioceses which are more

divided on this issue. These contrasting responses highlighted the 'postcode lottery' of women's ministerial experience in the Church of England. Even within a single benefice it is possible to find some parishes which accept and others which reject a woman's ministry. This contributed to women's sense of being perpetually 'on trial', or in the words of one woman 'only accepted until the next rejection.' There was a theme of powerful yearning running through the responses for a Church in which women can finally feel unconditionally included.

It was noticeable that those who had been ordained more recently were on the whole more confident that the Church is in the process of moving towards a full acceptance of their ministry:

'I am very new to priesthood, but have followed the General Synod's progress on women in priesthood for many years. It does seem to me that the time has come to move ahead to rationalise the question of women in the House of Bishops as well as in the House of Clergy.'

'I was brought up with female clergy in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and have always been amazed the Church of England in the UK has only 'recently' ordained woman to the priesthood. It also amazed me that the issue of women bishops was not included at the same time.'

'Since women were first ordained as priest in 1994 many people both within and outside the church have come to value the ministry of women ... Far fewer women may be called to become bishops than are called to become priests but for it to be possible shows something of the inclusive love of God that recognises people for their God-given talents and qualities and is not only concerned about their gender.'

'We have travelled a long road but hopefully the end is somewhere in sight ... nobody can seriously doubt that women's ordained ministry is here to stay.'

Some of those who had been ordained longer were less trusting of the institution having felt more profoundly let down by it in the past. They were not so confident that the Church is moving forward and expressed greater concerns that the legislation might not be passed, or that the passing of the legislation would not really address the underlying issues, or that the shape of the legislation might perpetuate obstacles to women's full inclusion.

'Interesting to reflect on one's own relationship with the institution. In the main I have felt supported in my ministry by this diocese, although like many ordained women I have experienced the frustration at being overlooked, pigeon-holed or assumed to be the curate. As for the institution, I feel I have exercised ministry despite the institution rather than because of it.'

The sense that women were generally becoming more disillusioned the longer they spend in ministry was quite a worrying finding. Whatever else happens in July, it will be important to give more thought to how women are being supported pastorally and professionally as they engage with the complex dynamic of ministering within the institutional Church of England.

'For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'

One of the most moving things about the responses was the opportunity to hear some women's personal stories in detail. Women talked about their lives and livelihoods before ordination, about God's call and their response, and about how their ministries had since unfolded. Read together this constituted a remarkable body of testimony – it would surely be perverse to believe that these women were all somehow corporately mistaken in their sense of God's call. Women described a wonderful variety of different sorts of ministry in which they were engaged. One of the features of the debate has been the way it has tended to 'flatten' our perception of women's ministries, reducing them to a few unhelpful stereotypes and relegating them to the status of an 'issue'. Reading these responses reinstated an appreciation of the uniqueness of each woman's spiritual journey.

Some contributors drew out the extent to which the Church of England now depends on women's ministry. Roughly a third of clergy in the Church of England are female and the number is increasing with more women than men entering training in recent years. Many of these are ministering without stipend which men are, on the whole, less willing to do. Women's goodwill is therefore very important to the Church:

'I work – like so many others – giving my time free for four to six days a week. In all honesty of course I will still work free if the vote fails: this calling is the deepest privilege that I know. However I do fear that my goodwill for the organisation of the church would have been damaged ...'

and I do not know what consequences this would have. The church is increasingly dependent on such goodwill these days.'

'God has called me to be a priest and I believe he is calling some of the women in my generation to be bishops. I dare to believe that the Church of England needs us. No one has asked what might happen if the three thousand women clergy in the Church of England were to decide that 'enough is enough', and move to another province where their ministry is welcome. No one has contemplated the effect of a further 'rejection' of their orders on those without whom the Church simply could not now function. Women clergy don't wish to hold the Church to ransom: but they also don't want to be taken for granted.'

Almost every contributor referred in some way to the wastefulness of not using all the gifts which God has entrusted to the Church. Like the fearful steward in the parable we are burying our talent in the ground instead of putting it to good use:

'It seems to me that a cruel blow would be dealt to our ministry as a whole if this does not get the vote ... if we are not permitted to respond fully and appropriately to what God is calling us to, then we grieve God's heart.'

'I never had any ambitions to be a bishop but am concerned for our younger sisters, that their considerable gifts will be frustrated and limited at a time when the church needs gifted and able leaders and that they will choose to join other Christian organisations where they will be fully accepted and there are no barriers to where their gifts and talents and calling can take them.'

'If I was in secular employment, any career aspirations which were limited by gender would be seriously challenged. Yet if God called me to become a bishop, no amount of wisdom or experience would appear to be enough under the present situation.'

To put it simply, if this legislation is not passed it would make me feel a definite second-class citizen. As you say, probably not many of us would feel called to be a bishop, but the opportunity needs to be there for all of us ... I would want to believe that the church chose its bishops on the basis of who was the best person for the job, who had the right gifts and

skills, and not exclude 50% of potential candidates on the basis of their gender.'

'It seems pointless for women to have been ordained if they (are) unable to fulfil roles to which they feel called and are eminently suitable. Acts 4:19 – 20: 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'

'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit'

Many of the women who responded were astonished and dismayed to hear that the Measure might not secure the required number of votes in July. It had not occurred to some of them that this could happen:

'I had thought that the fact that the majority of the Dioceses supported the measure would mean that it would be passed without question. That it still might be defeated fills me with horror that the Synod could reject something that has such overwhelming support from most people, men and women alike.'

Several contributors remarked that the support from Dioceses had been even greater than they had hoped. Although some had had to endure difficult discussions in their parishes and deaneries the majority had been hugely positive. How could the General Synod now say, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit – but not to us':

'All I would say is that I was so affirmed by listening to the discussion at my Deanery Synod when this measure was on the agenda. The body of the church has moved so far in its acceptance of women's ministry, mainly, I think, because on the ground we do a good job and bring another dimension to ministry which is really appreciated and valued. As someone who had a first discussion about ministry in 1980 – if this measure fails I cannot imagine how let down I and so many of us will feel. A demoralised priesthood is certainly no way to further the kingdom of God.'

'For a church which now fully recognises my ordination as priest to refuse to consecrate women bishops seems to be a deep hypocrisy and a

theological muddle. I have no wish to injure those who could not accept women bishops – but what do they think they are doing to us? ... It makes me deeply sad that the Synod appears to be reacting to bully tactics in this way.'

Contributors offered some theological reflection on the nature of spiritual discernment and the role of General Synod as part of that process. Members of Synod are delegates not representatives, they are not there to represent either their own views or the views of groups to which they may belong but to share in the task of discerning what God is calling the Church to be and do. There was speculation about the future of synodical government if Synod now failed to pass the Measure:

'What will be the way forward for synodical government if it has allowed a minority of people to hold the church to ransom and devalue the whole movement towards and decisions about the acceptability of women bishops?'

Some were aware that the composition of the House of Laity is already under review and thought it might hasten that process.

Some further comments clustered around the idea of 'reception', a concept that had been much talked about at the time of the previous vote on women priests. Had not the last 18 years provided ample evidence of the way in which women's ministry has been 'received' by the majority of people both within and outside the Church? Was not its sheer fruitfulness evidence that it was 'of God'? Contributors expressed despair at the 'fixed' nature of some of the opposition. Would any amount of evidence of reception and of God's blessing on women's ministry make a difference? What does it mean spiritually for us as individuals and as a Church if, after having prayed for guidance, we now refuse the clear prompting of the Holy Spirit?

'Since women have been ordained as priests they have by and large proved that this is the work of the Holy Spirit ... What I do not understand is that for some reason some minds have been blinded to what is really going on. Is this tradition talking or is it something else?'

One person struggled with the idea that the Church of England was not competent to make a decision in this matter:

'The Church of England has always made decisions; it has got to; it could not function otherwise. If people believe that the Church of England is not capable of spiritual discernment and godly decision making ... why would they want to be members of it?'

Others offered some reflection on the unfolding nature of revelation:

'Revelation ... is continuing and always unfolding. We need to forgive ourselves and each other for our unknowing – for all the persecutions we have done, the slaveries we have endorsed, the wars we have justified, the inequities we have enjoyed, the divisions we have initiated and blessed, the truths we have insisted upon. However, we need also to be aware, and to make clear, that resistance to revelation comes from fear: fears that thunder in the ego for affirmation, for a status quo that (falsely) promises changelessness.'

'I would add that from my own perspective I have always believed Christianity to be a continually revealing faith, one where each generation tries to discern the will of God in the light of the world they see around them. There cannot be, for my money, a moment in time when we said: 'That's right. We've absolutely got it. This is perfect.' Were that true then the Church of England might (indirectly) still be employing slaves. With each generation come new revelations. And such a revelation I believe has now come, in the 21st century, regarding women.'

'Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart'

*'Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart
O when may it suffice?'*

These words, from W. B. Yeats's poem *Easter 1916*, appeared in the early 1990s on a prayer card inviting people to pray for the successful passing of the legislation to permit women to be ordained as priests. At that time the formal debate had already been going on since 1975 when General Synod first voted that there is 'no fundamental objection to the ordination of women to the priesthood'. It suffered a setback in 1978 when a motion to 'bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the

priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate' was defeated. 'We asked for bread and you gave us a stone,' cried a voice from the public gallery as the voting figures were announced. It was a cry from the heart, articulating many women's pain, pain which is still being experienced today as the debate toils on into its fourth decade.

What has been the effect upon women's spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the long struggle first to be heard, then to be included and finally to be accepted on equal terms? It is virtually impossible to quantify. Many of those who responded spoke of the burden of guilt they carry, of the feeling that they and their ministries are seen as 'problem' rather than as 'gift', of a sense of being worn down by this issue which women have lived with for the whole of their adult lives:

'I have been a priest in the Church of England since May 1994. For many, many years before this I discussed and listened, argued and debated the issue of women's ordained ministry in the Church of England. I feel that I have been fighting this issue for so many years and now feel so weary of it. Since 1994 I have seen the growth, deepening and blessing of women's ordained ministry but I have also felt the pain that many have experienced ... '

"My overarching memory of the Priesting Measure was the call to silence at the General Synod's announcement of the result 'in deference to those who will be disappointed' ... The need to celebrate women in the Church, and the denial of a public opportunity to do so, has dogged us ever since, and the accompanying inappropriate guilt foisted upon us has permeated into an apologetic priesthood for women.'

For some the fierce discipline of trying to remain loving, generous and hopeful in the face of repeated provocations and denials has taken its toll:

'Probably like most women priests of that first era, we still carry the effects of that struggle for recognition all these years later, unseen by the general public who have no problem at all accepting our ministry as equal.'

'I ... hope that the Church of England will face up to its historic treatment of professional women ministers and offer us an adequate, sensitive pastoral response. We have heard a great deal about the suffering and

the victimisation of those opposed to the ordination of women as deacons and priests, let alone bishops. I pray that we will not sweep the pain that the women have suffered under the carpet, whether the vote is carried or not.'

Those responsible for making appointments in the Church are sometimes heard to regret that women often do not apply for more senior posts and wonder why this is so. There may be many factors but part of the answer must surely be that many women have so internalised the Church's ambivalence towards them and their ministry that they now lack the confidence to offer themselves for positions of responsibility, even when it is clear that they possess the necessary gifts and experience.

'A defining moment'

For many obvious reasons it would be a disaster for the Church if the Measure were to fail to win final approval in July. It would be contrary to the clearly expressed mind of the Church, it would call into question the integrity of General Synod as a decision making body, it would undermine the Church's credibility in the eyes of the world and it would commit us to a further five to ten years of divisive and debilitating debate.

What came across strongly in the responses was that a 'no' vote in July would also represent a turning point for many women personally. It would be felt not just as a rejection of a particular piece of legislation but as a deeper rejection of women's ministry and indeed of women themselves. One person envisaged that Bishops would immediately seek to reassure women and all who believe in their ministry that this was a temporary setback rather than a decisive rejection but that this might well prove unexpectedly difficult:

'I think that there will be many, both women and men, and especially young people, for whom the passing or failing of this measure will prove a defining moment ... What sort of place is the Church and is it for them? Is it a place where the institution can respond to the times it finds itself in – and the longings of so many? Or is it a place pre-occupied with itself, rather than its mission to those beyond it?'

'To say 'no' to women bishops would seem to show that the church considers women priests to be a lesser type of priest than men and

therefore their valued ministry is not seen as so important by the church which ordained them.'

'If the answer is no it means a loss of my own trust in the church within which I minister ... No means a difficult decision about my future in the Church of England ... No means the church still feels undecided about the value of women's ministry.'

'What we do reflects on Him'

A repeated theme in the responses had to do with the implications of a 'no' vote for the mission of the Church. All those who spoke about this felt strongly that it would be very damaging and some felt it would further undermine their own credibility as evangelists. The impact on young vocations, currently one of the Church's priorities, was particularly mentioned:

'It means that I feel compromised about speaking of vocation to young people; those who are more concerned with justice and fairness find the current wrangling distasteful and demeaning to the church.'

'I am not usually outspoken about this ... my calling and my ministry is among people, in community, in the real and the wonderful and the dreadful places where God has asked me to be ... but I do know that in my 20's when the initial call to ministry raised questions ... that I dismissed it because I could not marry this with the attitude of the church to women.'

'The secondary school I work with – 11-16 – would not be able to understand a 'no' vote as they have seen me in my deputy head role and as a key female role model. All the work that has gone on over the years so that the boys and girls are regarded on equal footing would be severely harmed. I would not be able to justify it and I would have to tell them so. If the schools are at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation (Lord Dearing) what harm will a 'no' vote do to the spreading of the gospel among the young?'

Another particular concern had to do with what ordained women are modelling to lay women and especially those outside the Church, about their value and worth in God's eyes:

'I am deeply saddened by the damage this ongoing debate is doing to people's perception of the church; the good work which is being done in ministry and mission is being obscured. Of course we are being seen as irrelevant when we seem still to be fighting battles in areas where the rest of the world has moved on. When I was asked recently how an intelligent woman can even be an Anglican, let alone want to be ordained, it is hard to give a convincing answer in the current circumstances.'

'I worked in the accountancy profession for 20 years before I became a priest and there was never any cause to think that men and women were different in their ability to do the job or to rise to the top of the profession if they wanted to do so. If only men are ever permitted to be Bishops it forever relegates women to be second best in the eyes of the Church ... But I feel God would not have called me or other women to a second best ministry. It will be hard to justify to my daughters why they shouldn't work to be the top in their chosen profession if I am part of an organisation which does not allow women to be the leaders. It totally goes against everything I have worked for or believed.'

Several women spoke about having done their best for pastoral reasons to help people understand why this issue is important for the Church and why there is controversy surrounding it. They had found it uphill work!

'It is very difficult for lay people to understand the theology behind the non-acceptance of women as Bishops. I find myself constantly trying to explain the viewpoint of the people who cannot accept women Bishops, but most 'just don't get it'! If the proposal is rejected it will separate the Church still further from society.'

'Because I still have many friends outside of the Church I am reminded frequently that our attitude to this question is completely at odds with the normal and rational view of the majority of people today. They all think we are mad or stupid, they are not sure which!!'

'As a parish priest I find it painful and embarrassing to have to explain to the unchurched why this next step in women's ministry is such an issue for those who claim to follow a loving and all sacrificing God ... it's no wonder people scratch their heads in bewilderment and turn away from God. For like it or not, what we do reflects on Him.'

Staying?

In his speech to General Synod in February 2012 the Bishop of Gloucester spoke about his fear of what would happen if the Measure failed at final approval stage. *'That would be a missional disaster and, I do not doubt, would mean a haemorrhaging of women from the Church's life and ministry'*. He received a prolonged round of applause. But is Bishop Michael right in his prediction? Will a 'no' vote cause some women to leave the Church and others to decide against joining?

It was clear that some women had confidence that they could continue to minister in the Church, especially in a supportive Diocese such as Salisbury:

'Our Diocese has been kind to women in ministry, enabling them to work alongside men and providing an atmosphere where people ... can flourish and show their capabilities within the love of God. Whatever happens, that will continue in Salisbury, for which I am very grateful.'

Some who had been faithful in the past through thick and thin now found themselves questioning their position for the first time:

'I am definitely not someone who has ever taken any action or written about the issue of women in the priesthood. I've tended to take the view that it is basically our role to nurture and care, not to upset anyone if it could be avoided, and if this means compromise on occasions then so be it. Since ordination I've been of the camp that says, 'I am a priest who just happens to be a woman' and left it at that. Now, however, I am moved to say something ...'

Others were committed to staying whatever the cost to them personally and these were among some of the most poignant responses received:

'As for myself, whatever the outcome of the vote, I shall continue in ministry, continue to pray for the House of Laity to see sense, and, if the vote goes against us, mourn the loss to a church that has nurtured and sustained me since I was a child of some outstanding talent and models of fidelity. I cannot believe that the church would deliberately want to cut itself off from half the population, but I fear that is what they would do. I cannot believe that that is what the Spirit is saying to the churches in the 21st century.'

'I have had many, many conversations whilst a member of General Synod and over this past year, with clergy and lay people who are considering whether they will leave the Church of England if Synod does not vote for women in the episcopacy, ordained as bishop in the same way that men are ordained as bishop. But I will not leave the Anglican Church. I know that I am called by God. I will continue to love Christ, I will seek to forgive the Church and I will faithfully keep watching, waiting, praying and battling on. I have worked towards the full acceptance of women's ministry in the church for over 30 years. I have known many dark days on this journey. But hopefully, the darkest hour of the night is the one before dawn. Whatever happens in July, and even if it gets darker still, I will continue to keep faith and continue to pray for the dawn.'

Leaving?

For some women the prospect of continuing within the Church of England if the Measure failed to gain final approval was more problematic. The sense of spiritual struggle in these contributions was very vivid but it was clear that leaving was an option some women now felt bound to explore:

'A vote for women bishops may mean that many priests and laity will leave the Church of England. I am sorry to see this happening and that the issue of women bishops is making many people face a crisis of conscience. But what of those, who in conscience, who believe that they are loyal Anglicans, now find that they will not be able to stay in a church that has made a decision against women bishops? Many will have to struggle with whether they can be part of an institution that forbids women to be bishops.'

'I love the Church of England, I chose to join it and have had fourteen years of ministry that have been challenging, joyous and enriching ... To leave this would be an enormous wrench ... What sort of compensation can ever repay the stillbirth of a vocation to serve as a priest within the Church of England? A 'no' vote means that I will be exiled and psalm 137 will become my song, how will I be able to continue, but how can I leave? 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion ... How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land?''

'I feel I could not continue to be a member of an organisation which discriminates against women. I suppose up until now I was willing to give the Church of England the benefit of the doubt. No-one expected it to happen overnight. But there would be something very deliberate about a 'no' vote now after so much debate. This time we would be acting with our eyes open and that would make a difference to me.'

'Like last time's vote, my resignation will probably already be written with a stamp attached if the vote is rejected. Thank God I never had to post it last time. I will resign quietly, and it won't hit the headlines. I'm convinced many others will choose the same path.'

On the question of whether to stay or leave the women among them expressed a full range of responses from 'definitely staying' to 'definitely leaving' and all possibilities in between. What was remarkable was a sense of women's total support for one another in whatever response each one chose to make. There was no suggestion that those who planned to stay were 'selling out' or that those who planned to leave were 'deserting the ship'. It was recognised that this is a tough place for everybody, that people's situations differ very much, and that each of us has a principled decision to make.

'Generosity and grace'

At General Synod in February one speaker, perhaps unguardedly, referred to those who oppose the Measure as 'oppressors'. At this a sound between a groan and a hiss ran round the chamber. Another speaker stood to protest forcefully that he and those who share his point of view are emphatically not oppressors. This was greeted with some applause. It was an uncomfortable exchange, perhaps revealing some of the fears at work among us. For those who have opposed the ordination of women as bishops and priests there is now enormous anxiety about how they will be treated if women do become bishops. Will they really be accorded 'an honoured place' or will they find themselves discriminated against in their turn? It is this anxiety, or something like it, which underlies the demand for yet more legislation.

The contributions received were revealing of what women are really thinking and feeling about this. It was made clear in the letter that responses would be unattributable so there was nothing to prevent contributors from being honest. However it was absolutely clear that women have no wish to

discriminate against those who cannot accept their ministry but are committed to finding ways of continuing alongside one another as far as possible:

'I am sure we must try to keep our brothers and sisters on board and to maintain a church which includes and provides for a secure place for those who feel they cannot serve or operate under a woman bishop.'

'I have no wish to interfere with anyone's worship or spirituality and believe that (with good will on both sides – an attitude which seems to be sadly lacking in some of the public debates) local solutions can generally be found.'

'Perhaps the words 'generosity' and 'grace' need to find their way in there - as a two way thing – eg I was very impressed that the Bishop of Ebbsfleet had been offered the Cathedral (even with a woman Dean ...) for his Chrism Mass. Surely it is all going to hang on 'generosity' and 'grace' whatever happens ...'

'I pray for all who disagree – that our relationships may be characterised by grace and generosity and not by that acrimony which the media so love. May the Holy Spirit of Pentecost hover over God's Church, giving us discernment, courage and healing as we share together in the task of decision-making and bringing in Christ's Kingdom.'

This is not say that there was not also some frustration, with concerns expressed about the prevailing negative bias of the debate and the timidity of some our decision making:

'I am sure that most of the men involved have never stopped to think what pain they are inflicting by their words and actions, if they did so then they would surely be less intransigent.'

'I entirely agree that the focus throughout the debate, and certainly in the vote that happened in the deanery I am a part of, has been an anxiety to avoid hurt to those for whom this issue is a source of difficulty. So much so that we spent the bulk of the time discussing a motion calling on diocesan synod to lobby for statutory protection for those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops rather than the central issue.'

'I do feel that the opposition to Women Bishops is being reported loudly and vociferously partly to feed the media debate and to present two sides of the question 'in the interest of fairness'. It seems because of this a small minority are in fact being given up to 50% of the coverage of the issue and that this has partly created the problem.'

'We shall, as a Church, want to care for those in trouble with any decision, but I wonder whether the decision should be made first, and then the care put in. Surely we are trustworthy enough to care for our own? If we are not, no-one is. Perhaps my nursing background makes me want to do the necessary emergency surgery, and then handle the healing and convalescence. A medical model is not always inappropriate!

'I have been very careful about the feelings and beliefs of those who object to women in ministry. I have respected their scruples, and cared about their welfare. But the time has come, I think, to see these scruples as what they are – very small measurements!'

There was an acknowledged sense of hurt at some of the language that has become prevalent in the debate – words such as 'threat', 'taint', and 'protection' – and the suggestion that bishops generally, or women bishops in particular, might not have the pastoral needs of everyone at heart:

'I am happy in my priestly ministry and have no ambition for myself. But I do find the continuing talk of 'taint' and 'invalid orders' very hurtful, and I would find it very hard to have continuing confidence in and love for the Church if a vocal minority were so accommodated, that the position of any woman in episcopal orders would be compromised. It would be a clear indication that the Church as a whole does not really value or care for the ordained women who now carry a significant percentage of the pastoral work ... and that would leave me very grieved and uncertain of my ministry.'

'... if a grieving family asked for a male priest to take a funeral, I would find them one. In fact I thought that they were brave to ask and I never found it offensive. What I do find offensive however, is the fear in those opposed to the ministry of women that a woman bishop would not automatically operate in the same pastoral way, without some law requiring her to do so, when it is deeply ingrained in her whole being to do so.'

In general it seemed to be taken for granted by contributors that there could and should be generous provision for those opposed. Would the same degree of goodwill continue to exist if the debate were to run for a further five to ten years?

Conclusion

Because women were specifically asked how they would respond if the Measure failed, much of the material gathered in this article is quite 'dark' in tone. Our 'voice' has been sombre as we have faced up to all that that might mean for our lives and ministries. But running through the contributions was also a golden thread of excitement and anticipation. The Church is approaching a moment of new opportunity, not painless but potentially liberating and life-giving. We continue to be hopeful that the Measure will achieve the necessary majorities in July.

There was little in the responses about the legislation as such. Women were clearly aware of the shape and content of the existing legislation and there were some glancing references to the issues surrounding any changes which might now be made to it. But in general the focus of the responses was elsewhere, no doubt because of the way in which the letter and the invitation in it had been phrased.

Although the focus of this article is necessarily on the events of the next few months it was good to be reminded by some contributors of the bigger picture and the longer view. Some were able to express a deep serenity about what the future might bring and a faith in God's purposes which would not be shaken even if Synod rejected the Measure this time:

'... I live as a contemplative under priestly orders ... supporting people through a ministry of prayer and spiritual direction as they face their challenges in following God's call. What gives meaning and purpose now is to explore with others how we practise our faith; how we can support each other in a regular discipline of prayer; how we encourage each other to the giving of our hearts and minds to the work of personal transformation to put God at the centre of our lives ...'

'A theology of knowing that what is hidden and precious to God will one day be shown to be His, is most comforting in all of this ... God's chosen,

unrecognised servant-leaders will be apparent in the Heavenly realms, both men and women, young and old, rich and poor.'

'But love casts out fear, and the Christian journey has always been one of exploration and the setting out across thin ice of life. That is half its excitement. 'Be not afraid!': how often does Christ urge us to be this?'

A number of those who responded did so in the form of songs, prayers or poems which in creative, passionate, poignant, funny or delightful ways expressed women's buoyant and unquenchable hope for the future. Thank you to you all and I have chosen just one to round off this article:

*When I'm an old woman there will be women in purple,
with the regulation pointy hat which might cause hairstyles to revolt.
They will spend their time opening the kingdom in different ways,
as we have always done,
and bravely questioning some of the nonsense there is in The
Organisation.
They will always be appropriate if not always predictable.
They will not need to ape the men
but will be confident in their own calling to be leaders and pastors.
The men in purple may feel threatened.
They may wish to maintain their privilege, their long held upper hand.
But once we all realise the complementary gifts that each can bring
we can all set a good example of Christ's teaching to our people
and realise that we are all in this Body of Christ thing together.
But maybe there ought to be a little practice now?
So people who know the Church are not too shocked and surprised
when suddenly women wear purple.*

After Jenny Joseph's 'Warning'

'Should I stay or should I go?: on trying hard to remain within the Church of England'

Jane Charman

'Should I stay or should I go?' sang punk rock band The Clash in 1981. There have been many cover versions including a spoof one created by editing together various speeches of Tony Blair to make it appear that he was performing the song! The lyrics punch to the heart of a personal dilemma. *'If I go there will be trouble/ if I stay there will be double/ This indecision's bugging me/ exactly who'm I supposed to be?'*

Among the material gathered from the women of the Diocese of Salisbury there were a number of responses in which women were pondering whether there was a future for them in the Church of England, as ordained ministers, or even as members at all. The July vote was perceived as a watershed moment, in the light of which decisions would have to be made. Some talked openly about resigning. Others – and I count myself among them – were not yet sure what their response would be but understood that a 'no' vote would have moral and spiritual consequences which could not help but redefine their relationship with the church as institution. I found this was a theme I wanted to explore a little further.

I have been a Christian all my life – baptised as a baby, confirmed as a teenager, responding to a call to authorised ministry as a young adult. Aged 22 I arrived at Westcott House to be trained for – well, this was in the early 1980s so no-one was precisely clear what women were being trained for – but the upshot was that I was licensed as a Lay Worker to serve in two parishes in the Diocese of Gloucester. In 1987 I was ordained deacon as soon as the legislation was passed and in 1994 while Chaplain at Clare College in Cambridge I was ordained priest, as part of the first cohort of women. Since then I've served nine years as an incumbent and Rural Dean in the Diocese of Ely and eight in my present post as Director of Learning for Discipleship and Ministry in the Diocese of Salisbury. All of that adds up to 52 years in the Church of England, of which 27 have been spent in full time stipendiary ministry, and during that time there have been three occasions on which I have seriously considered leaving.

The first occasion was during my time as an undergraduate. The College I went to happened to be St John's College, Durham, linked of course to Cranmer Hall, and here for the first time I met men who were preparing for ordained ministry

and the smaller number of women training alongside them for other expressions of ministry. It seems extraordinary to me now that I, a reasonably well educated and articulate young woman, could have reached the age of 18 without seriously questioning or critiquing the role of women in the church. But for me it was simply part of things-as-they-were and at that time I was unaware of the already well established and increasingly influential campaign for women's ordination.

Now however I was beginning to be politicised – or perhaps theologised would be a better word. During a long vacation I wrote an article for our parish magazine – it was my first foray into print – setting out why I believed women should be ordained. Our curate wrote a response setting out why he believed they shouldn't. What he said about women, their nature, their place in God's creation and their proper role in the Church, came as an eye-opener to my naive younger self. Perhaps I had believed that once they were put straight on a few key facts and had overcome their natural anxieties about change, most people would quickly accept ordained women. And so I had my first real glimpse of the long dark taproot which is the Church's fear of and antagonism towards female human nature.

It was a turning point for me. I was becoming interested in liberation theology, especially feminist theology, and this threw up a key question to which I urgently needed an answer. Christianity along with Judaism and Islam was described in the books I was reading as a 'patriarchal' religion and I could see that it was. The God that Christians worshipped was addressed as male, indeed some seemed to think he was male, or if he wasn't actually male then he certainly wasn't female! Christianity relied on a foundational document written by men who were speaking almost exclusively about the perceptions and experiences of men. Throughout history the life of the Church had been organised by men. Women were there too but they were to be silent and submissive and they were not supposed to lead or teach. They were to be idolised, they were to be ostracised, they were to be cherished, they were to be punished, but it was apparently quite impossible that they should simply be included on equal terms.

And so my question took shape and acquired content. Is the gospel 'good news' for women in the same way that it is 'good news' for men? Is women's humanity capable of being loved, affirmed, assumed and redeemed in the same way as the humanity of men? Is the Church 'substantially' patriarchal or is it only 'accidentally' patriarchal? Or to put it another way are those aspects

of its identity and practice which have been, and in some cases still are, unquestionably sexist, of the 'substance' of the gospel message or did the Church at the very beginning of its life succumb to the patriarchal norms of the society in which it was set, norms which it is only now beginning to scrutinise and resist? I thank God for the wise pastors and friends with whose help I was able to work through these questions and claim my faith afresh. If I had arrived at a different set of answers I would have been off. Today I would probably be a lawyer or a teacher and who can say whether the institutional Church would have any part to play in the life I would be leading. I strongly suspect I would now be in the category sometimes referred to as 'closed de-churched'.

The second occasion on which I seriously considered leaving the Church of England came in the early 1990s. By this time a deacon I believed my vocation to be to the priesthood. I was involved in speaking, writing and campaigning on the issue of women's ordination. During the 1970s and 1980s the Church had continued to examine and explore the arguments for and against. At first these discussions were mainly confined to those with a level of theological knowledge but as the arguments were rehearsed and became familiar more and more people felt able to express an opinion. There was increasing pressure to 'take sides' and perhaps inevitably positions started to harden. In particular some organisations which had previously tolerated a range of views began to require members to be committed to a certain stance. One example of this was The Society of the Holy Cross (SSC).

SSC was and is an association of priests in the Anglican Communion who live and minister under a common Rule of Life and are committed to valuing and upholding the catholic identity of the Church of England. At this time I had a number of priest friends and colleagues who were members of it, of whom some were in favour of women's ordained ministry, some were unsure and some were opposed. In the period immediately preceding the vote SSC began to present itself more and more strongly as being corporately opposed. It was not an uncontested change of emphasis but it proved decisive. Those in favour or wishing to keep an open mind gradually left, in some cases reluctantly. The SSC of today is synonymous with opposition to all forms of women's ordained ministry.

As someone who was myself formed and nurtured in the Anglo Catholic tradition this hardening of the catholic wing of the Church of England against the possibility of women's ordination presented me with particular difficulties. Central to my faith is a catholic understanding of what it means to be the

Church but to be a catholic is to be opposed to the ordination of women – or so a great many people were insisting. The Roman Catholic Church strongly upheld this position and in fact went far further, treating it as not merely difficult or controversial but beyond the pale of serious consideration. Today it is not possible for the ordination of women to be discussed within the Roman Catholic Church and anyone holding office or a position of public responsibility can expect to be disciplined for doing so. Such a response, revealing extreme psychological anxiety, seems extraordinary now but at the time it undoubtedly added to the pressure on those of us who were seeking to understand our place within a Church which is both catholic and reformed. Was it possible to have a catholic identity and be an advocate of the ordained ministry of women? History has answered ‘yes’ to that question, at least as far as the Church of England is concerned, but at the time I struggled greatly and I know many other people, both male and female, who did the same.

Alongside ecclesiological reasons, I also had personal reasons. By this time I was married to my husband who was ordained deacon in 1990 and priest in 1991. If the Church were now to refuse women priests a second time would the strain on our marriage, where one person was free to grow and develop in ministry and the other not, prove too great for us? Although it was clear from the voting in Dioceses that there was majority support it was far from clear that the legislation could achieve a two thirds majority in all three houses of General Synod, a situation not dissimilar to the one we are in today. At that stage we did not have children and we had both been attracted in the past by the possibility of emigrating to New Zealand. It would have solved our difficulties. We had some exploratory conversations followed by a meeting with the then Archbishop of New Zealand, the Rt Revd Brian Davis. Almost certainly if the vote had been ‘no’ we would have exited the Church of England in order to start afresh in New Zealand. It was a surprise and a delight when in 1992, against the expectation of many of us, the General Synod voted to open the door to women priests after all.

This is now the third occasion on which I have found myself reflecting on my relationship with the institutional Church of England and whether I can remain with in it. The issues this time are both simpler and more complex. I no longer struggle as I did before to understand whether Christianity is capable of embracing both men and women as fully human; I am convinced that it is. I no longer wonder whether I can be both a catholic Anglican and an enthusiastic supporter of the ordained ministry of women; I know that I can. What

exercises me now are deeper questions about faith itself, not faith as religious commitment or belief but faith as a way of life.

'What are you spending and being spent for?' asks James Fowler in his seminal book, Stages of Faith? 'What commands and receives your best time, your best energy? What causes, dreams, goals or institutions are you pouring out your life for? As you live your life, what power or powers do you fear or dread? What power or powers do you rely on and trust? To what or whom are you committed in life? In death? With whom or what group do you share your most private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love? What are those most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life?' 'These, proposes Fowler, are the real 'questions of faith'. 'They aim to help us get in touch with the dynamic, patterned process by which we find life meaningful. They aim to help us reflect on the centres of value and power that sustain our lives. The persons, causes and institutions we really love and trust, the images of good and evil, of possibility and probability to which we are committed – these form the pattern of our faith.'

In the second half of life perhaps these questions become sharper and more immediate. Now aged 52 I have another 13 years of working life ahead of me or perhaps a little more. I want to use those years 'in good faith', as Fowler might say, and in a way that gives meaning and purpose to my life. I want to contribute to the building of God's kingdom here on earth by living and working in ways that are congruent with my deepest personal beliefs. The equality of all people in God's sight is for me such a belief. If all people are made in God's image then to discriminate against some, whether on grounds of gender, race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation or for any other reason, is to blaspheme God's image in them. This belief is foundational for the way I want to live and that must include refusing my allegiance to any organisation which either explicitly or implicitly practises discrimination.

So is the Church of England sexist and if so is it 'institutionally sexist' or does it merely contain a larger than average number of sexist individuals? How does one distinguish between 'individual' and 'institutional' sexism? Some organisations have recently been forced to confront their own 'institutional racism'. The Metropolitan Police Service has been obliged painfully to plumb the depths of this issue – the Church of England has so far avoided doing the same. 'Institutional sexism' is systemic – it occurs when a number of factors including organisational discrimination, cultural bias, and personal prejudice mutually reinforce one another. 'Institutional sexism' is resilient – it is capable

of prevailing even when a majority of individuals within an institution are already persuaded of the rightness of acting in some other way. If the Church of England ticks the box then that poses a real and painful question for those who are members of it.

Friends have remonstrated with me about this. Surely I can see that the Church of England really wants women bishops. It is 6 years since the General Synod agreed that having women as bishops is 'consonant' with the faith of the Church. 42 out of 44 Dioceses have said they want to proceed, with huge majorities of those voting, voting in favour. Isn't it just a matter of process, of getting the right number of votes for the right form of legislation? Even if the Measure were to fail this time, surely we should wait, try again, carry on working for what we passionately believe in. I can see the force of this argument but I also hesitate. At what point does working for change within an organisation become collusion? That's not easy to discern but the following is my rule of thumb: I think I can remain within the Church of England so long as I believe it is moving in the right direction, however slowly, but I don't think I can remain within it if I believe it is moving in the wrong direction, however reluctantly. In 1975 when the Church voted against women as both priests and bishops there were perhaps some mitigating circumstances. The issues were new to people, they were not well enough understood, society was still openly prejudiced against women in many ways, we needed longer. This time the situation is different. This time we have explored the issue very prayerfully and thoroughly over a prolonged period, people are fully aware of the arguments, we will require legal exemption in order to refuse to have women bishops. If the Church of England now votes against the full inclusion of women in its life and ministry it will have done so knowingly.

But does it matter if the Church of England is 'institutionally sexist'? That would hardly make it unique and surely in other ways it is a powerful force for good? I believe passionately that it does matter. Sexism is an evil that blights the lives of many girls and women within our own society as well as elsewhere in the world. As Christians it is something we are called upon to resist in whatever form it appears. When we set our faces against sexism in the Church we do so not just for the sake of a few women who ought to have the opportunity to fulfil their vocation as bishops but for the sake of the victims of the many ugly and sickening stories which regularly appear in our media – of female abortion and infanticide, genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killing, of pornography, rape, domestic violence and blatant discrimination in the workplace. Of course we wish to distance ourselves from

these crimes which we wholeheartedly condemn. Yet because of our own continuing ambivalence towards female human nature and long defended discriminatory behaviours we are also implicated. At the very least we have helped to legitimate and excuse what others have done. This is a 'hard word' for the Church to hear, and some will not be willing to hear it. Because the issue of whether women ought to be bishops is deemed to have been settled and the focus now is on the shape and form of the legislation we have perhaps begun to lose sight of the underlying imperatives. As we approach what may be the final vote it is right to remind ourselves why we are doing this and why it matters so much.

Like many of us it is my own children who put my values under the spotlight and really cause me to challenge myself. I am proud to be the mother of two beautiful and talented daughters. I want them to walk tall in life and fulfil their potential. I want them to have the courage and self confidence to refuse the many negative stereotypes that other people may try and thrust upon them. What am I modelling to these young women about to begin the world regarding their value in God's eyes and how they ought to value themselves? I cannot avoid knowing that my words and actions and the example I set may make a lasting impact on them. When they remember me, will it be as a woman of conviction, someone who 'walked her talk'? Or will they chiefly remember the discrepancy between what I said and what I did, between my 'operant' and my 'espoused' theology? This is in many ways the most painful part of my dilemma. I want my children to have a Christian faith and I want them to be members of the Church. But more even than that I want them to have 'good faith' and to live lives of dignity and integrity. Will this be possible for them within the institutional Church of England?

So should I stay or should I go? I have been an employee of the Church of England all my adult life. How easy would it be to find an alternative way to earn a living? A visit to 3D Coaching for a career makeover to identify my transferable skills? Could I find a worthwhile role in the not-for-profit sector? Is it too late to retrain as a teacher? The logistics are not straightforward and in the meantime there is a mortgage to be paid. In 1994 when the Church agreed to ordain women priests it also agreed to make financial provision for those who felt that in conscience they would have to leave. I recall a great deal of anger – not only did it seem as though we were rewarding people for their misogyny but we were using resources which the church sorely needed for mission and ministry in order to do it. Even if the Church of England were now to make some similar provision for ordained women would I be able to accept

it? The idea produces a certain queasiness but that may be a luxury I literally cannot afford.

All of this is difficult but at the heart of my personal dilemma there lies a question more fundamental still. For if I cannot continue to minister as an ordained person is it really any different to continue as a church 'member'? Would ceasing to take the ecclesiastical shilling alter the nature of the transaction in any meaningful way? My inner jury remains 'out'.

Yet there are perhaps glimmers of clarity. I know for instance that I cannot be separated from the love of God. I believe that I will continue to be part of Christ's body the Church even if I struggle to express this in terms of institutional membership. I am clear that I wish to be 'in communion with' every baptised person, whatever views they hold about this matter. I understand that it is not we who choose friendship with Christ but he who chooses us and binds us together in Him, whether we will or no. So I will not cease to live a life of faith. Whatever happens I will continue to be a person of prayer, looking for signs of God's Holy Spirit at work in his world and wanting to join in. How this can be reconciled with 'membership of' and 'affiliation to' an organisation is a question which might defeat a better theologian than I will ever be but I know that I must continue to ask the questions. The next few months may be decisive and they remain to be lived through. In the meantime – I will be keeping my spiritual director on his toes!

'After July' ... and why it matters to England'

Robert Key

"I'm a pretty regular sort of guy" said the PM. And his chief spin doctor confided, "We don't do God" in spite of No 10 effectively appointing the bishops and most deans of the Church of England.

It is important to realise that most of the regular sort of guys across the road at the Palace of Westminster don't, on the whole, see the Church of England as we see it, breathe it and live it. That wouldn't matter if they didn't have a veto on our Church legislation. But they do – so it does.

Even if the Church of England were to be disestablished, the regular sorts of guys (of all sexes) who inhabit most of England, would also see Churchy things differently. This matters because the reputational damage to the Church of England would be very great indeed if we insisted on setting ourselves apart from the society in which we live, rather than proclaiming our faith from generation to generation, in the communities in which we live as members one with another. That, after all, is the whole basis of the Church of England's existence, founded on scripture, tradition and reason.

Either way, regular guys really mind about what their church and ours, says and does about the Women Bishops Measure. And that is why members of the General Synod should feel a keen personal responsibility if they are thinking of trying to stop the progress of the Measure as it was debated and agreed in our Dioceses and by the General Synod in February 2012.

Most people who think about it, I suggest, have either positive or negative views on the ministry of women. Not many people sit on the fence. Either they take the broad view that, as in the rest of society, women should no longer be barred from the top jobs in the Church, especially when the Head of the Church is the Queen. That is the view of Sir Roger Gale, Conservative MP for Thanet North, who described himself in the recent Westminster Hall debate as 'a fully paid-up reactionary'. He said, "This is a question about not equality but the right person for the job. This has been going on for far too long. The moment is not with us: it is way past and the decision should have been taken by now. The bishops will be doing the church, of which I am proud to be a member, no service whatever if they duck this issue. It is time to move forward". Or they take the view that a woman's place is in the home, reflecting

commonplace prejudice. But not, apparently, Commons prejudice – for no MP spoke against the motion.

Feminism, equality and male headship

I, for one, do not see female ministry as an item on the feminist or equality agendas. I really want women as priests and bishops because I want us to be one whole Church – not a diminished or partial Church because we exclude women from fulfilling their undoubted and proven pastoral gifts, spirituality and leadership. I think most communicants in our parish churches would agree with that. I suspect most London cabbies would, too.

Nor do I see it as a default position that only men should lead our Church in the 21st Century because Jesus was a man. Yes, he was (though some theologians argue otherwise). But God doesn't need sex. I understand that the issue of male headship is very important to many opponents of women in Holy Orders. To me, it is obvious that Jesus would have chosen men as his first leaders for the simple reason that to have chosen women in the social climate of his day would have been to ensure failure. Just consider the 21st Century parallel we are witnessing in Afghanistan, with Taleban prohibition of women's activities being reintroduced day by day by the Afghan government that supported female emancipation for a decade. The men and women serving with HM Forces in Afghanistan will have pretty positive views about that.

There is no doubt in my mind, and plenty of evidence, that Jesus valued women as much as he valued men. He had very little to say about the role of women in society. As far as the Bible goes, he left it open.

Mind you, St Paul had a lot to say about keeping women in their place. That should come as no surprise. He was a very conventional person – an establishment man, working for the Government, and a child of his time. The society in which he lived and taught was rigidly but unthinkingly prejudiced against women by our values today. He, of course, thought it was normal.

But St Paul was a little confused. On the one hand he is alleged to have said (1 Corinthians 14) that women should keep silent in church, be subordinate and if they had questions, they should ask their husbands. But he also said (Galatians 3 v. 28) 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. This was nothing short of revolutionary because every orthodox Jew, then as now, began the day with a prayer which said

“Thank you for making me a man not a woman, a Jew not a Gentile, free not a slave”. In his day, only male prayers counted and women did not pray.

Jesus was brought up within those same social constraints. Yet he broke many of the rules. He talked to women who were strangers. He taught women. He spoke of women as equal to men. He accepted women in his inner circle. His parables were about both men and women. It was mostly women at his crucifixion. He appeared first to women after his resurrection. Of course he chose men as his disciples – unmarried women travelling with men was unacceptable and reception of his teaching would have been impossible. In short, Jesus trusted women. He engaged with, depended on and encouraged them.

It was men that assailed and failed him – not women. Never forget that Jesus was an agitator, an activist, a reformer. It is to me unthinkable that in the 21st Century He would support exclusive male headship. And there is plenty of evidence that in the early Church people like Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, Persis, Chloe, Joanna and Susanna were authority and leadership figures – even for St Paul. It has always been our loss that from the fourth century, female Church leaders appear to have been suppressed by an increasingly male hierarchy. I wonder what the men and women on the tills at Tesco’s would make of that?

Soul-searching or self-indulgence?

There is a place for inward-looking self-examination. But when does that become self-indulgence? It is self-indulgent to say we should not agree to proceed without even further concessions to those opposed, in a Church where a quarter of our priests are women and half our ordinands are women, in an Anglican Communion where two-thirds of the Provinces have women priests and one third have women bishops. And in a process of discernment where huge concessions have been made by women, so that there will still be parishes where women cannot minister as either priests or bishops. And amazingly (to me and I suspect to the regulars at the Queen Vic in Albert Square) we will still accept for ordination young men who declare they will never accept women as priests or bishops. The evidence is clear. The ordination of women has not fundamentally changed the priesthood – it has extended and enriched it.

Of course we will look after those who remain opposed. That is a given. That is a default position. That is a matter of trust we must all accept. And please do not let us lose our nerve lest we upset our brothers and sisters in the Church of

Rome. I do ask myself how much longer they can hold out. Nearly a decade ago the Church of England was ordaining nearly 500 men and women a year, while the Church of Rome ordained just 52 men in Great Britain, 17 men in Ireland and 103 men in France. By 2010 we accepted 515 for ordination (108 of them under 30, almost half of them women). Even in Italy there were fewer ordinands (456) than in the UK. These are statistics that interest mums at the school gates – and their representatives in Parliament.

Women bishops and gay marriage are touchstone issues for the Roman Catholic church too. The most senior Roman Catholic in Britain, Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Glasgow, has condemned the latter as 'the heretical tyranny of tolerance'. But the former Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh, Douglas Murray, said recently, "The interesting thing is, if the Pope decided tomorrow that gay people could be married or ordained, (he) would do it ... it's an issue of authority. I remember Tom Winning, the last Scottish Cardinal Archbishop of Glasgow, saying to me, "I'd ordain women tomorrow if the Pope told me to" ".

The Church in England shall be free

Thinking once again about how others see us, what of our historians? The Venerable Bede told us that the English nation is the child of the Church. Successive generations have seen our Church informed, modified, ignored, enlarged and renewed. But it is through scripture, tradition and reason that the Church of England's existence is assured.

The Church in England has always been different from the Churches in other nations. When the old Kingdoms of England disintegrated, our Church grew greater – because our Church alone expressed the consciousness of the English people. Through Norman Conquest, Magna Carta, the Statute of Praemuneri of 1393, our Church ploughed its own furrow. When the Reformation came, it was bound up with our national identity.

Queen Elizabeth's Reformation Settlement was pure genius. Since then the over-arching authority of scripture, tradition and reason was never in dispute. Our Church is tolerant of a wide variety of faith and practice. It is alert and responsive to changes in public mood and opinion. There can never be any permanent settlement. We cannot abandon our *via media*. We must always be on our journey, our pilgrimage, our *via*. We must not be held back by those who are tired of new mission, or tired of the people of England – who are abandoning us because we will not move forward in faith with them. Hence the perceived advance of secularism. After July, the secularists would dance in

the streets if we failed to agree the Measure. And there'd be much shaking of heads down at the Old Bull and Bush.

Opting in or opting out?

And another thing. As Diana Johnson (Lab, Kingston-upon-Hull) said in Westminster Hall, "Many people might be quite shocked to realise that the established church of this country has been allowed to opt out of equality legislation". She is correct. In 1975 the General Synod agreed there were no fundamental objections to women priests – the same year our Church first asked to be exempted from Sex Discrimination legislation. I am embarrassed by this – and by further exemptions for which we begged (and were granted) in the Women Bishops Measure. This says to the kids on the block being helped by our Street Pastors that Christians are not, after all, normal people. We cannot cope with the real world you live in. But that is wrong. To go with the grain of how people live today is not to capitulate, not to give in to current fashions nor to secularism. It is to strengthen our case.

Successive generations have seen our Church informed, modified, vilified, ignored, enlarged and renewed. We have to do what the Church of England has learned to do since the Reformation – square up to the world through scripture, tradition and reason.

Down the ages the story has nearly always been the same. As Professor Diarmaid McCulloch puts it in his magnificent book *'Reformation – Europe's House Divided'*, from Aristotle through Clement of Alexandria, Galen to Augustus of Hippo, what Christian theologians asserted about men, women and sexuality was, by today's understanding, nonsense - but it was ancient nonsense and humanity has always been inclined to respect the assertion of ancient wisdom.

It should not really surprise us that it was not until the age of Enlightenment, the invention of microscopes, and the advancement of science in the Eighteenth Century that we even began to understand human sexuality. Meanwhile some Divines have caused women great grief by their dotty and horrible pronouncements. Chris Bryant MP (Lab, Rhondda) reminded the Commons that while Bishop of London, Graham Leonard had said that a woman was no more ordainable than a potato. After July, that must not be true for bishops any more than it is for priests.

Call it sacramental assurance, headship, collegiality, maleness – call it what you will, dress it up in ecclesiology but it all comes down to the same thing: “Woman – thou shalt not pass”. That’s how it looks to the people on the tram in Manchester and the 0750 from Clapham Junction. And to me.

So what do all Her Majesty’s subjects, whom the Church of England is meant to serve, think of all this? Notions of maleness and femaleness are constantly redefined – by custom, by culture, by generation and by Parliament. For example, in 2002 the Government lost a landmark case in the European Court of Human Rights and the Government was forced to legislate to allow transsexual people to change their legal gender. Now our Government is consulting on changes to the Civil Partnerships Act which would allow ‘gay marriage’ – leaving religious exemptions intact.

Young people are not impressed by ‘male headship’ theories. Nor is anyone who has witnessed and experienced the ministry of women and the authority, dignity and charisma of our women spiritual leaders. After July we could have a wonderful fresh expression of our faith. Or not ...

In 1919 Parliament did a very extraordinary thing. It gave to our Church the unique right to make our own laws, which have the same status as Statute Law, on one condition. Lords and Commons must agree that such laws are expedient for all Her Majesty’s subjects. Under the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act, Members of Parliament of all faiths and none, in Commons and Lords, must agree that the Church’s laws (Measures) will not disadvantage anyone they represent. In return, the Established Church will reach into every parish in the land, every corner of our life, from top to bottom, with the lessons of Christ. So ducking equality law and any whiff that women bishops will be second class, gives MPs a real problem. It will be our fault – not theirs – if this Measure fails. Parliament clearly wishes to maintain their relationship with the established Church. If we reject the Measure in July, there will be many legislators who will ask more urgently why we should get away with opting out of equality legislation.

From one generation to another...

The God I worship and in whom I live and move and have my being, is a 21st Century God. How can He bear to see our reluctance to move on? He gives us brains and education. He teaches us how to do it. He tells us how to use our responsibilities, how to make moral judgments. Why do we so often lack courage? Because it is so much easier to say ‘no’. In doing so we cut ourselves

off from God's people and God's purpose and reach for the comfort-zone of old stories, old beliefs, yesterday's Church. We let Him down by saying 'no'.

We've had nearly 500 years to think about this. In 1531, William Tyndale, wrote in his *Answer to Thomas More's Dialogue*, " If a woman were driven onto some island, where Christ was never preached, might she there not preach him, if she had the gift thereto? Might she not also baptise? And why might she not, by the same reason, minister the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and teach them how to choose officers and ministers? O poor women, how despise ye them!"

One of the great leaders of our Church at the Reformation was our own Bishop of Salisbury, John Jewell. In his great book *The Apologia*, published in 1562, Jewell said, "We have planted no new religion but only renewed the old". He argued that local churches had the right to legislate through Provincial Synods.

Four hundred and fifty years later, we are still waiting. This is not some 21st century competition. We are nearing the end of half a millennium of discernment. This is not a race between catholics and evangelicals – neither should anyone be so puffed up as to think their views are powerful enough or significant enough to over-ride the love of God in giving full ministerial gifts and responsibilities to the whole human race not just half of it.

The English have never liked being told what to think or do. The more strident the secularists become, the firmer the determination of the Queen's quiet, tolerant subjects to hold on to their Church, warts and all. For our Church is the place you put the things that won't go anywhere else in our big society – births, marriages and deaths, anything that is life-changing from tsunamis to war, Christmas carols to Royal weddings. Church is there to show us what a community looks like and to celebrate humanity. Church teaches us about all the things that really matters in life – including justice, ethics, family, love and charity.

Our Church decided many years ago that the issue of women priests, then women bishops was not Church-breaking – let alone faith-breaking. So, after all we have been through together, I pray we will trust each other in July and then move on.

A broad and living way...

Let us be generous in our faith and inclusive in our ways – lest we shut the door on Jesus. Following our decision to reject the Anglican Communion Covenant, we have an opportunity to lead by example in creating new relationships that will be more Commonwealth than Empire, more inclusive and ecumenical, less rigid and counter-cultural than we have been used to. That will be easier if we catch up with – and lead – those provinces of the Communion that already consecrate women as Bishops. It will be harder if we fail to include women on our Bench of Bishops.

Our obsession with human sexuality is becoming an indulgence. It is holding us back from our work of mission. After July we must look forward to a new Primate of All England to lead us on our journey alongside our people of all faiths and none. He (for it must still be a 'he' next time) must dutifully wash the feet of the poor and needy as well as befriend the good and the great and understand all those regular sorts of guys. He will find that easier if he is a brave man, prepared to take risks for Christ and sure-footed in a new Church led by women as well as men.

The silent majority in our nation also expects their Church to work with our world as it is, not to stand aloof. So we should respond in tune with the times. That is a strength not a weakness. People facing unemployment, poverty, injustice, crime and discrimination do not expect us to discriminate. They are watching us as we hesitate and falter. As the Second Church Estates Commissioner put it in The House, "I hope everyone will search their soul and I also hope that, if people are opposed to the Measure, they will recognise that there comes a point when it is necessary to acknowledge that, in the interest and well-being of the Church of England, the Measure must be progressed".

Our people are waiting and watching. Parliament is puzzled and waiting. The Government is ready and willing to expedite due process. Why are we so timid? It is the tradition of our Church to nourish the flame of reform. Bishop John Jewell would surely agree that we are seeking to implant no new religion, only renew the old. This legislation is evolutionary not revolutionary. It is fair, not unfair. Its time has surely come.

'What's a girl like you doing in a nice job like this?'

Jane Lloyd

Only yesterday, as I write, I made an amazing discovery on the Web. Looking up my old school, I discovered three school photographs including a year that I was there. Scanning the picture I easily found me, on the front row, with the other 'newbies' in our ghastly pinafores.

There I am, 11 or 12 years old – just around the time that I left the institutional Church for what, I thought, was for good. I left because a group of my classmates, who were due to be confirmed that evening, laughed at me as I read my Gideon New Testament. It was only several years later, thanks to my German pen-friend, Christel, that I returned to active church-going.

I suppose I was about 8 or 9 when I first asked God to find a job for me; I had a very real sense of Jesus as my friend, clearly distinguished from my imaginary friend 'Crusoe', so it was natural that, along with my ambition to be a scientist, I should also begin to experience a sense of vocation.

I was 18 when, at the 8 o'clock Communion Service in my local Parish Church, I suddenly realised as the Vicar spoke the words of the Eucharistic Prayer that that was what I should be doing and that was what I wanted more than anything else.

With it came the realisation that I had never seen a woman Vicar, so perhaps I was mistaken, but I got myself confirmed anyway 'just in case' and carried on for the next few years in blissful ignorance, studying Chemistry and growing more involved with the parish as a Youth Leader, Lay Visitor (an embryonic LPA role) and as the youngest member of the PCC.

When I was 22 or 23, we employed a Parish Worker, Doreen Page, and I began to feel the stirrings of vocation again. I was working as a Chemist, running the laboratory in a local biscuit factory, knowing that I was in the wrong job but being gradually caught up in the lives of the men and women on the shop floor, listening to their problems and finding out what made them tick.

Eventually I went to a selection conference then known as an 'ACCM', and was recommended for training as a Licensed Lay Worker – the only role available to women straight from Theological College. I believe that God's hand was on my choice of college – the return fare from home was 10 pence cheaper to Lincoln

than to Durham, so, by chance, I went to the former for interview on the weekend when all the staff and students decamped from the Chapel, to worship in the Cathedral. I had never experienced Cathedral worship before and I was blown away by it – I knew that I had to go to Lincoln to study for the sake of this very special Sacred Space.

It was a good thing that I did, because I met Nigel Lloyd on my first day (we started together) and we were eventually married on my last day of training just two weeks before I was ordained as a deaconess in Lincoln Cathedral, the Church of England having changed its rules half-way through my first year, so that women no longer needed to wait two years after training to be ordained.

Between 1977 and 1979 I was selected three times by the Church – Parish Worker, clergy wife – I kid you not! – and deaconess. Since then I have had to go back for selection three more times – to be a deacon (1987), a priest (1994) and (without my input) a Canon of Salisbury Cathedral (2003).

Unquestionably, apart from the various toppings-up of my ministerial roles inside the Church of England, marriage has been the other major covenanted commitment of my life. Together Nigel and I have faced the huge tensions which the Church has placed on our ministries and our marriage. We have tried to reconcile the fact that we have been drawn together for life because we are male and female; we have explored that delightful interplay of personality, sexuality and love which lies at the heart of marriage, but we have both suffered because the very difference which has brought us together has been the cause of overt, and covert, discrimination in the church that we have served for over 35 years.

For him, the course of his ministry has been comparatively plain-sailing – college, then ordination in 1981 to serve his Title, then First Incumbency and then to whatever job or jobs he wished to apply for. There was virtually no question on the day he left college clutching his GOE certificate, that he would remain a deacon or never be an incumbent ... both his priesthood and his role as a Parish Priest were foregone conclusions.

For me it was slightly different; partly through our own choosing. We were 28 when we married and knew that his curacy was the ideal time for me to go non-stipendiary in order to have our two daughters, so mine was always going to be a more chequered career.

I had felt called to sector ministry early on in my training and to hospital chaplaincy in particular, so when we moved to Lytchett Matravers in 1984 with a 2½ year old and a 5 week old baby, I asked the Bishop of Sherborne to keep an eye open for a part-time chaplaincy for me. In 1985 I was asked to take on the chaplaincy of Poole General Hospital for two days a week, in order to prepare for the appointment of a (male) whole-time chaplain in a few years time. When it was ready for a full-time appointment, the rules had again changed and it was decided that 'suitably-qualified' women could be licensed as chaplains as long as there were men available to do the 'priestly' tasks and provide back-up!

Fortunately for me I fell in love with Poole Hospital and I have been there for nearly 27 years in a chaplaincy which I have helped to grow and develop – in roles which have substantially changed every 5 years or so, meaning that in effect I have had about 5 different jobs including being elected President of the College of Health Care Chaplains – our professional body. Ironically, being President also meant that for two years, I was a national Trades Union leader!

In 1990 Nigel and I were two of the one hundred people who responded to Bishop Richard Holloway's call for those on the Catholic wing of the C of E to affirm their positive response to change in the Church; he deplored the then tendency for people who called themselves 'Catholic' to always being associated with resistance to developing trends, and to being known for what they could not stomach, rather than for what they embraced. This movement became known as Affirming Catholicism.

We went to AffCath's first conference where a young priest-theologian called Rowan Williams spoke beautifully about Tradition. He said (my interpretation) that we should not regard it as being like a Box Room where we store all the rubbish of yesterday which we no longer use, but that we should regard it rather as the Living Room where we mix the treasures of our past, with the things we need for our lives today!

Our faith has to be continually living, growing, adapting to new understandings and God's continuing revelation. We have learnt so much! In my lifetime we have gone to the Moon, and landed scientific instruments on Saturn's largest moon Titan – over 1 billion miles away! We have begun to recognise that the so-called differences between the sexes are largely down to social conditioning – that women can successfully reign over countries for 60 years, can be priests,

scientists, entrepreneurs, economists and doctors just as easily as they can be nurses, secretaries and housewives!

When Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of ECUSA, came to preach and speak at Salisbury Cathedral a few years ago, she impressed me most of all with her graciousness. I said to her, after she'd spent some time tackling some fairly aggressive questioning, that I hoped that when the C of E ordains its first women bishops that they would be as gentle, gracious and wise as she appeared to be. I think I nearly made her cry!

I do hope that the first Church of England women bishops will not be 'company men' but will be allowed to bring their particular gifting, as women, into the role. Their presence in the House of Bishops will be prophetic – finally we will have visible evidence that 'in Christ, there is neither male nor female ... but we are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Like many of my contemporaries, I never wanted to be an ecclesiastical demolition expert; I wanted to be a bridge-builder. If the vote for women bishops does not go through, (and if it does, I hope we won't settle for a grudging, fudged acceptance), then I also hope that the Church of England will face up to its historic treatment of professional women ministers and offer us an adequate, sensitive pastoral response. Many years ago I reflected on such treatment as the equivalent of a spiritual 'gang-bang' – rape is a nasty and invidious act and I believe that there are many women in ministry who still bear the scars of abuse and psychological violence, perpetuated individually and institutionally.

We have heard a great deal about the suffering and the victimisation of those opposed to the ordination of women as deacons and priests, let alone bishops. I pray that we will not sweep the pain that the women have suffered under the carpet, whether the vote is carried or not.

150 years ago this year, Elizabeth Ferard was ordained as the first deaconess in the Church of England. Yet a senior clergyman once chastised me for being too impatient and pushy about the priestly ordination of women. 'After all, Jane', he said, 'you have to remember that women have only been in the church for the last few years'.

Clearly he had forgotten that women were there from the beginning – in the stable, in the crowds who flocked to hear Jesus, to plead for healing, to anoint

him with oil, to stand by him at the foot of the Cross when his male disciples had fled, who came to the Tomb early on the first Easter morning, who were the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

If the bishops are the spiritual descendants of the apostles, it is worth remembering that Mary Magdalene was the first person sent by Jesus to announce the good news that he was risen – the first apostle was a woman!

I wonder what my 12-year old self, preserved on the Internet from 1964, would have made of it all! Would she, had she known what all the fuss would have been about, all the pain to come, the energy-sapping discrimination and prejudice, still have made the same decisions? I hope so!

'Lost in translation?: gender, sexuality and the Church of England' ***June Osborne***

Last summer there was an afternoon, when I walked between the Deanery and the Cathedral just before Evensong and found myself in conversation with some teenagers who were lying on the grass enjoying the sunshine in the Close. Unfamiliar with the inside of any church I suspect, they began our discussion with a rather blunt question:

“Why does your church hate women and gays?”

The exchange was direct and unexpected but it was really no different to conversations I have constantly with people in Wiltshire and Dorset who wish the Church of England well but think it has simply lost its way in its approach to gender and sexuality.

I have served the Church the whole of my adult life, entering training and my first parochial appointment straight from university. I used to joke with people that I was so stupid – or youthfully compelled – that I failed to notice that the Church of England didn't really want women's ministry. Or at least it wanted it on terms which no self-respecting women could collude with. As if to prove that, one of my peers at Wycliffe Hall said to me as we left college to serve our respective curacies, “I have a vocation whereas you're going simply to do a job.”

I sometimes wonder what I would have made of my sense of call and all that lay ahead of me if someone had then told me that the General Synod would still be equivocating about women in ministry 40 years later.

Would I have believed then that in 2012 the Archbishop of Canterbury would be chosen through competitive interview and the House of Bishops would be virtually the only all-male body left in mainstream British society?

It is one of those intriguing coincidences served up by history that the selection process for choosing a new Archbishop of Canterbury will happen right alongside the General Synod's moment of decision on the legislative package for women bishops. They are clearly not unrelated because, whoever gets chosen to occupy the seat of St Augustine, the really important factors are the priorities and tasks which he will have to address, including the consequences of this vote.

It is an exciting time to be an Archbishop. The relationship between religious traditions and the public realm becomes ever more interesting as we discover how to strengthen a pluralist society through Christian values which have to be promoted rather than assumed. Individuals, confident in their right to autonomous choice, may no longer respond dutifully to the institutional claims of the Church of England but they are attracted by communities which show integrity and hunger for spiritual authenticity. The resources to pay clergy are diminishing but that could produce a church better off for its dependence on its lay leadership, prepared to rethink its patterns of ministry and its strategic ambitions. The one thing we know is that it is a time of unprecedented change: the world faces multiple challenges and yet we also see the blossoming of knowledge based industries leading to an entrepreneurial revival, asking from us a constant need for flexibility and innovation. In the working life of my daughter who graduates this summer there will be more transformational technologies introduced into UK society than in the five centuries prior to the 20th Century.

How is the Church of England in its established role, high and low, going to be a church for this nation of innovation and open models? What do we have to contribute to a vibrant and compassionate civil society and a new social contract?

In the discussions about a new Archbishop between the Deans someone used the phrase 'a vicar for England'. I guess they were drawing on that sense of pastoral connection which the best vicars have with everyone in their parish. Someone who is able to speak to our hearts and minds in a way unchurched people can still recognise and relate to. It's about building bridges of understanding and encouraging a shared sense of purpose.

We know that people now tend only to trust themselves to organisations where they see authentic leadership and find meaning through engagement and emotional connection.

So it is no small matter that the next Archbishop of Canterbury inherits a church which is believed by the whole of civil society to be condoning and cultivating prejudice and bigotry.

Within our lifetime British society – taking its cue from the Christian values that all people are equal in the sight of God and that he treats all people as such – has determined that a fair and just society should outlaw prejudice, and leave

no hiding place for inequalities. This was once lampooned as “political correctness” but I wonder if we realise how deep into our collective DNA this belief has now penetrated?

This is not to say that we should collapse all the theological boundaries and fashion ourselves only according to the cultural mores of our contemporary setting. On the contrary our neighbours want to see our faith as robust and distinctive. But they also want to sign up for what they think will create human flourishing, for a faith which is non-coercive and which encourages the potential which every person has to grow and to contribute to building a good society. Putting restrictions on people simply because they are old or female or disabled or gay or from an ethnic minority looks to most of our neighbours like an untruth. The church has totally failed to persuade our society that there are good reasons to maintain such categories as blocks to progress or fulfilment.

So the vote on whether to endorse this particular package of legislation for the introduction of women bishops goes far beyond our internal scruples about “sacramental assurance” or headship. British society has watched the legislative processes take too long. They know enough of that story to know that there have been stalling measures, a deliberate desire to take the process as slowly as possible not in order to build a proper consensus but in order to prevent us bravely moving forward.

British society has also seen the symbolic forces which describe our ambivalence and fear. Do you remember the moment in July 2008 when the General Synod voted for the House of Bishop’s motion to agree in principle to ordain women bishops? Perhaps you also remember how, immediately following that decision, the two Archbishops with strained and stern expressions led their episcopal colleagues out of the Synod to a “crisis meeting”. That was the image and headline in the following day’s papers. The Synod had just endorsed the Bishops’ motion and resolutely agreed that God was calling our church to introduce women bishops so what was the “crisis”?

It is such symbolic actions which have led ordained women to feel that their goodwill has been damaged and that it is difficult for them not to internalise such ambivalence. Yet in wider society it is not that loyalty to the church which is being stretched but our whole missional credibility.

If a new Archbishop has any hope at all of convincing our nation that the Christian faith is credible and the church is worth joining then we need swiftly

to recover from our reputation that we “hate women and gays”. Including women unconditionally in the historic three-fold orders of ministry would go some way to rehabilitating us in the public eye. Without it I believe we are destined for humiliation and marginalisation in the lives and communities we are meant to serve. We will look simply incredible, and surely will deserve to be treated so?

'Reflections on women and the episcopate'

Stella Wood

I have vivid memories of watching the General Synod debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood on 11th November 1992. I watched it in a little student flat off the Woodstock Road in Oxford on a television screen that was equally little compared to modern flat screens. I was in my second year of research for my doctorate and the afternoon had been set aside for last minute preparation for a meeting with my Supervisor, scheduled for late that afternoon. Instead, I sat, gripped by the drama unfolding on the tiny screen and honestly unsure of which way the vote would go. My sense of personal vocation to the priesthood was slowly evolving: it was yet to be openly articulated, let alone tested but the sense to me, as a student of Church history, that something crucial was happening in the debate, overtook the immediate task in hand. As the debate went on, the chances of my seeing the end of it before needing to head off for the supervision were receding. And so it was that, having hung on to see the result of the vote, I found myself hurtling down the Woodstock Road to St. Hugh's College at breakneck speed, arriving as a chime struck the hour. My supervisor, a Scottish Presbyterian, was as ever, delightful enough to take one look at me, sense my excitement and abandon any hopes of sensibly discussing the potential contents of the chapter we were due to flesh out. He celebrated with me and was to support me all the way through to my own ordination shortly before his tragically early death from a heart attack. He too remembered that day and our re-focused meeting long after and we often thought back to it with a smile.

I do not think that it dawned on me at the time that nearly 20 years on we would be on the brink of another cornerstone debate, this time surrounding the Episcopacy. One is impatient and optimistic in one's early twenties and I think that I probably took it for granted that the major hurdle had been jumped. I should have known from my studies of Church history that this was not to be the final act of the play and that debates are so often cyclical.

It comes as no surprise to me now, quite a bit older and a bit wiser, that in 2012 our focus is on the Episcopate. It seems to me that throughout history, when the Church has been worried about its identity or feels under threat, that anxiety is articulated through a debate about the nature of episcopacy. Is it of the *esse* or *bene esse* of the Church? Is it Biblical? Is it Apostolic? Is its purpose intricately interwoven with that of the State or to be distanced from it?

Perhaps the clearest parallel comes from the period which I studied in Oxford, the nineteenth century and in particular, Keble's Assize sermon which has been taken as the start of the Oxford Movement. The sermon and the subsequent Tracts for the Times called for a vision of the Church where the Bishops were key. What was the catalyst? The perceived changing relationship between Parliament and the Church of England where non-Anglicans were to be given access to political power and then could in turn use this power to make decisions about the Church of England. The echoes in the debates about the House of Lords in 2012 are easy to hear. Yet the key point is that the Tractarians believed that the Church was in danger and so it was to the nature of the Bishops and their apostolicity that their arguments turned. Tract 7, attributed to John Henry Newman although not published under his name, wrote of the '*fact*' of the Apostolical Succession¹ and the authority of the Bishops which had been faithfully passed down from the earliest Apostles. Authority in the Episcopate came not from the State but from this apparently unbroken line. In turn this infused the whole Church with authority and identity.

Across the Channel, in the Ultramontane camp of the Roman Catholic Church, the debate was to take an unwelcome turn at the close of the 19th century with regard to Anglican Bishops. The Roman Catholic Church had been responding to feelings of threat particularly in France by emphasising that its authority lay not with national governments but '*beyond the mountains*' and particularly in the person of the Pope whose infallibility was declared in 1870 at the First Vatican Council. The authority of the Papacy and correct apostolic succession was to lead Pope Leo XII to declare in *Apostolicae Curae* in 1896 that all Anglican orders, both priestly and Episcopal were invalid due to the failure of the Ordinal of Edward VI to express the sacred Order of Priesthood. Taken mechanistically, the Apostolic Succession had been broken or had become 'extinct' and the Episcopal authority within the Church of England had been broken². Here the debate was about the Bishops' right to ordain and which

¹*As to the fact of the Apostolical Succession, i. e. that our present Bishops are the heirs and representatives of the Apostles by successive transmission of the prerogative of being so, this is too notorious to require proof. Every link in the chain is known from St. Peter to our present Metropolitans. Here then I only ask, looking at this plain fact by itself, is there not something of a divine providence in it? Can we conceive that this Succession has been preserved, all over the world, amid many revolutions, through many centuries, for nothing? Is it wise or pious to despise or neglect a gift thus transmitted to us in matter of fact, even if Scripture did not touch upon the subject?*

² *Apostolicae Curae*, September 18th 1896., 35 & 36: '*Then, considering that this matter, although already decided, had been by certain persons for whatever reason recalled into discussion, and that thence it might follow that a pernicious error would be fostered in the minds of many who might suppose that they possessed the Sacrament and effects of Orders, where these are nowise to be found, it seemed good to Us in the Lord to*

ordinations can be legitimate, a debate not unfamiliar as we approach General Synod in 2012. At a time of perceived crisis, once again debates turned to the Episcopacy.

Debates about the nature and authority of Episcopacy were not the unique fascination of the nineteenth century. The period of upheaval of the English Civil War, the Cromwellian period and the Restoration demonstrated an equal concentration on the role and rights of the Bishop. While in the Laudian period, in the reign of Charles I, Bishops had come to be more and more instrumental in the Civil service³ and Church courts had considerable authority. the pendulum was to swing radically in the opposite direction with the abolition of the Episcopate in the English Church in October 1646. For 14 years there was no authorised Episcopacy in England at all. It was restored, with the monarchy, in 1660 as the pendulum swung back away from the Puritans to those wishing to re-establish religious authority and uniformity. The nature of the authority of the Bishops and to what extent it was God-given and Biblical was at the heart of the debate as was illustrated by the writings of Richard Baxter in the early 1680s. His complaint was that the Church of England's Episcopacy had moved away from primitive and Biblical Christianity and so had gone wrong *despite* not *because of* the Reformation⁴. Once again during a period of acute difficulty for the Church, debate had focused on the Episcopacy.

If one goes back to the Patristic period then the dispute, following the Diocletian persecution and the Donatist controversy, reflects very similar dynamics in the debate, as recriminations followed the decisions by some to sacrifice to the gods, or to obtain certificates to suggest that they had, and thus avoid persecution. To what extent could they be readmitted to the Christian fellowship or were they somehow tainted by their wrong decisions? What about those such as Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who had fled Carthage and the persecutions while others stayed to face the danger as confessors? Had those who had consumed pagan sacrifices been physically and spiritually

pronounce our judgment. 36. Wherefore, strictly adhering, in this matter, to the decrees of the pontiffs, our predecessors, and confirming them most fully, and, as it were, renewing them by our authority, of our own initiative and certain knowledge, we pronounce and declare that ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been, and are, absolutely null and utterly void'.

³ William Juxon, Lord Bishop of London was for example also made Lord High Treasurer of England according to Laud's diary, 6th March 1636.

⁴ See particularly Baxter's *A Treatise of Episcopacy.... Mediated in the year 1640, when the et caetera Oath was Imposed.* (1680).

polluted? Cyprian's answer was to call on the authority of the Bishops at a council in Carthage in 251 and to support that move, in a time of considerable crisis for the Church. He wrote *On the Unity of the Church* proclaiming the Bishops as successors to the Apostles and especially to St. Peter. It was not to convince all and the Donatists were to split from the Church because they were unable to accept Bishops who had not been supportive of the confessors. The crunch came with the complaint that a *traditor* Bishop (one who had handed over the Scriptures to the authorities) had consecrated Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage and that this had invalidated his consecration. Issues of taint, of personal actions, of response to persecution came to influence the authority of the Bishop and his true apostolicity as rival Bishops were elected.

In each of these examples (and there are others which could equally well have been cited) one can hear notes from the arguments which have been expressed in the run up to the 2012 General Synod debate. I strongly believe that there is much that our Church can learn from its history, not least a sense of perspective about how new or threatening the contemporary challenges we face as a Church are. As I said earlier, it does not surprise me or indeed worry me that the debates about Episcopacy have come to the fore now.

What does worry me however can perhaps be summed up in three points.

First, I feel deep concern for the ways in which history has been used and abused within the debates. It will not do to treat history – the lives of faithful men and women – to gain ballast for our pre-formed ideas any more than it does to scour Scripture for proof-texts to support our ethical viewpoints. We have heard much in speeches about the Apostolic Succession and the nature of ministry in the Early Church which does not stand up to historical scrutiny: there is so much from the Patristic period that we do not know and we have to be honest about the inconclusivity of the evidence. The early Church was much more transient than we would like to admit, the Church in the 17th century was much more transient than we often allow for, and the danger is that we create a fairy-tale scenario of a succession which has been rock-like throughout. We create a constant to reassure us in difficult times. The only rock, the only constant for a Christian however is surely God and we do not need to press history into contorted shapes for another one.

Second, I feel deep concern about the legacy which our generation leaves to history by the debates of 2012. We have seen above claims to authority for the Episcopate in terms of apostolicity, in terms of faithfulness to Scripture, in

terms of faithfulness in times of great adversity. Whilst I do not agree necessarily with the stances taken within the debates themselves, the criteria themselves have some theological validity. How will historians look back on a debate in the 21st century which has brought nothing fresh to the debating floor apart from gender? In a year when we celebrate the Queen's diamond jubilee and her faithful service as the Head of our Church, how sad that it is gender that becomes the criterion for authority. Never has gender been a note of the Church, a clause of the Creed, a credible exclusion category for the faithful. How will future theologians and historians of the Church view our debates except as an anachronism from a patriarchal society rather than a Christ-like Church?

Third, I feel deep concern that were the General Synod motion to fail in July, our debates will continue to draw attention to the human and not to the divine. It is God and his gift of salvation in Christ that should be the message which those who seek for truth in our age should perceive in our Church and not an ongoing debate about human authority. I dread the prospect of another 7 years of debates on the issue which appear at society at large as indulgently introspective. Our authority as priests, the authority of others called as Bishops, is *from* God and *in* Christ and that must be at the heart of our seeking. I do not believe that our ministry is reliant on some mechanistic human chain to make it valid. To place too much emphasis on this, to claim it is of fundamental rather than secondary importance, risks leaving out God's ongoing hand in our history and his fresh call to each generation. If we are serious that our authority is in Christ, then let us remember that it was St. Paul (who was not known either for his Episcopal status or for his pro-woman agenda!) who wrote powerfully in Galatians 3 that

²⁸*There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

²⁹*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,
heirs according to the promise'.*

In Christ, debates about gender have little meaning and it is in trust in God that we need to allow Him to call the right people to lead his Church onwards. My hope and prayer is that our future Bishops will be the right people, irrespective of gender. It is that our focus can be on the Kingdom God calls us to build and our spotlight on the poor, marginalised and vulnerable people in

our world who should not be as they are, rather than on our own internal affairs as a Church. That is what would make us truly apostolic, truly catholic, truly courageous and may even help us to be one.

History, despite its flaws, its foibles and its dead ends has passed down to our generation a precious and life-giving gift: let us not obscure it in our generation by drawing attention to the institution rather than to the Christ who sets us free.

Contributors

The **Ordained Women of the Diocese of Salisbury** are a diverse, talented, prayerful and committed body of priests and deacons but not yet bishops. There are 149 ordained women out of a total 385 ordained clergy currently serving in the Diocese

Jane Charman is Diocesan Director of Learning for Discipleship and Ministry. She has served in both urban and rural contexts, and in sector as well as parochial ministry. She is a non residentiary Canon of Salisbury Cathedral and a member of General Synod

Robert Key is a member of General Synod. He is Chair of the Salisbury Diocesan House of Laity and a Lay Canon of Salisbury Cathedral. From 1983 – 2010 he was MP for Salisbury, serving in the Thatcher and Major Governments. He was a Member of the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament

Jane Lloyd is Head of Chaplaincy at Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. She was the first woman president of the College of Health Care Chaplains. She is a non residentiary Canon of Salisbury Cathedral

June Osborne has been Dean of Salisbury Cathedral since 2004. She was previously Canon Treasurer and has also served in parish ministry in Birmingham, Oxford and London. She was a member of General Synod at the time of the passing of the legislation to ordain women priests

Stella Wood is Co-ordinator for Learning for Discipleship in the Diocesan Learning for Discipleship and Ministry Team. She was formerly Chaplain and Head of Religious Studies at Sherborne Girls School. She is a theologian specialising in 19th Century Church history

