

*Sermon Trinity VIII Women bishops...*

The Bishop of London has called all the clergy to a Sacred Synod to discuss the vote in favour of women bishops. I should like to try to explain this vexed issue and to set out precisely what it is about and to clear up misconceptions. It is not about women's competence to preach and say prayers in church.

We sometimes have women to preach at St Michael's. I simply don't think it is right for the Church of England – which is but one small part of the worldwide Catholic and Apostolic Church – to go it alone and consecrate women bishops. The change is so momentous that surely the mind of the whole Church should agree on it before any decision is made?

Let me make this very plain. The question is not of whether a woman can actually say the Holy Communion Service, solemnise weddings and ordain priests. Anyone can say Mass. You could teach a parrot to do it. The issue is whether the Church of England should unilaterally make this profound innovation. It is a question of *church order* – bluntly of whether the C. of E. is within its rights to make these changes. I do not believe it is. Besides, after agonised prayer, Our Lord appointed twelve male apostles. The Gospel says he ordained them. He had warm and close relations with women. But he did not ordain any of them – not even Mary Magdalene

Those who favour the ordination of women and the consecration of women bishops generally cite the example of the other professions. They say, *We have women doctors, women judges, women astronauts – why not women priests and bishops?* The question simply misses the point by substituting secular standards of judgement for legitimate church order.

I am an old-fashioned liberal. By this I mean that I do not expect everyone to agree with me, but I do believe strongly that allowances must be made for people who beg to differ on any big issue of policy. Even such a dyed-in-the-wool liberal as John Stuart Mill understood that democracy is not just about counting heads: it is about ensuring that dissenting minorities have their views represented. Sixteen years ago, such allowances were made for those who could not conscientiously accept women as priests. The same sort of provision should have been made for the significant minority who cannot accept women bishops. That it was not made amounts to the criminal dispossession of traditional Christians

What broke out in last Monday's Synod debate in York was sheer nastiness and spiteful intolerance when the feminist supporters of women bishops voted against any legal safeguards to cater for those who voted against. Particularly shocking was the fact that this vicious refusal flew in the face of the expressed wishes of The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishop of Durham and many other senior churchmen. More than a few fair-minded Synod members were in tears at the end of this monstrous act of uncharitableness and one bishop went so far as to say that he was *ashamed* of the Church of England.

. The radical feminists who pushed through the motion call themselves *liberal* and *inclusive*. But their liberality and inclusiveness extends only as far as those who agree with them. This is not liberalism at all of course. Those bigots are like Trotskyists

who work within an institution to subvert it and to turn it into its opposite. They are the Church Militant Tendency. I have had reports of that Synod and of the savage triumphalism, sneering and gloating which followed the announcement of the vote. These people are terrible

So what will happen now? Many priests and laypeople will leave the C. of E. in disgust and despair and head for Rome – or just stop attending church altogether. Others will seek independence from what they now see as a corrupt church. They may seek alternative Episcopal oversight – that is to live and work under the authority of a bishop who, like them, will not accept women bishops.

The church will be the poorer for their departure. The C. of E. was always an easy-going collection of parties: High, Low and Broad, bound together by their shared use of *The Book of Common Prayer*. People tolerated those with whom they disagreed. That polite arrangement has been shattered forever by the way the radical feminists have ridden roughshod over a whole section of church opinion.

I am not exactly privy to the secret counsels of the Archbishops and the leaders of the Synod, but as a priest with nearly forty years service and, like most clergy of my age and experience, I have a pretty good idea of who's in the frame when it comes to which women are going to be among the first to be made bishops. And one thing is clear: they will not be traditionalists. By the very nature of the case they will be chosen from among those who were most strident in favour of the innovation.

There is a female ascendancy in the church and it has a certain character. It is broadly feminist, left-wing in politics and obsessed with environmental issues. Let me give a couple of examples. On Ascension Day last year a sermon was preached in the City of London – and broadcast on the BBC - by a woman priest very widely tipped to be one of the first of the new bishops. She said the original Apostles of Jesus thought the world was about to end. They were wrong, she said. But we today know the world is coming to an end – because of global warming.

I was speaking with another likely candidate on Lord Mayor's Day in Guildhall. She was standing alone so I went up to make conversation. I asked her how she was finding life in the City. She complained, *Oh it's all so white, upper class and male!* I felt like answering, *This is the City on one of its days of traditional high ceremonial. What did you expect – the lumpen proletariat, black section, with bongo drums?*

Ms Vivienne Faull, Provost of Leicester is one of the front-runners to be made bishop. She seems to want women priests to be sex objects. She complains: *Dangly earrings, nail varnish and heels are seen as inappropriate – even the slightly erotic is not normally thought acceptable*, Ms Faull declares, *What I love is watching the new generation who feel freer to express themselves. I hope the rules get loosened a bit*

I have attended services where the worship was devised by this female ascendancy. We were asked to place little nightlights in the sanctuary, then prance around them as if we were part of the anglo-catholic daisy chain. Sentimental choruses instead of robust hymns.

On another occasion the suggestion was:

*What about a worshipful line dance or a Christian conga or a jive-for Jesus? I was relieved though to see the further advice: The aim is not to shock people...be modest in what you wear so that people can focus on God and not be distracted by the dancers' attire.*

The old pagan religion is back: the howling women from the Scottish play; candles and magic; stultifyingly boring incantations; the desire to bring female eroticism to the altar; worship of the earth: what else is global warming except a pagan myth?

*Fair is foul and foul is fair: hover through the fog and filthy air...*

I don't object to the presence of lefties, feminists, excitable environmentalists, gay-libbers and not-too-erotic dancers in the church's senior ranks but when so many members of this particular clique rise to positions of high authority, the longstanding and warmly tolerant tradition that the church should be a home to wide variations in character and opinion among bishops and clergy will be eroded. The church will be a meaner, narrower institution.

The church will become dominated by a single party – the politically-correct party. There will be demands for equality between traditional views of marriage and gay partnerships. We shall hear – indeed are already hearing – a lot more about light bulbs and carbon footprints. An obsession with global warming and with the whole repertoire of trendy social policies. There will be a corresponding dearth of doctrine and theology. For the people who will assume control of the church are generally uneducated: they attended dumbed-down theological colleges where little was taught except about diversity, feminism, environmentalism and institutional racism. Really we are seeing the growth of a paganised, feminised, secularised and trivialised church in which those who profess traditional faith are ridiculed and marginalized.

But if, as seems likely, there will be women bishops in due course, then the church will become a harsh and disagreeable place, over-feminised, out of balance, angry and inhospitable to anyone who will not toe the party line. I will not toe the party line. I will never accept the authority of a woman bishop. I will not accommodate myself to the paganised, feminised, modernised church. I will not accept the authority of this politically-correct coven. So what can we do, those of us who try to teach and practise traditional Christianity?

For the first time in thirty-eight years as a priest, I am dejected. The bishops who were appointed to care for us have abandoned us. I look out over the church I have loved for a lifetime and now I see only darkness visible. But yet there is our God. We must stay and fight our corner, content to be the church in this particular place. We must continue to preach and teach the true faith in all its glorious fullness – not the dumbed-down prejudices of a trendy sect. We take strength from the Sacraments and from our fellowship together in this place. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. Give me your help and companionship. And may God bless us all.

