

I don't want us to become preoccupied by issues debated in the General Synod, but I need to say something about women bishops. I will try to be concise and then leave the subject severely alone for the foreseeable future.

Last week the Synod confirmed its determination to have women bishops. Disconcertingly, the resolution does not include any proposal to provide statutory provision for those who in conscience cannot accept women's episcopacy. So the benign genius of Dr John Habgood, when Archbishop of York, which offered the notion of *two integrities* at the time when women priests were originally approved by the General Synod, has now been overthrown. The latest synodical resolution will also abolish the roles of the Provincial Episcopal Visitors – the so called *flying bishops* – created in 1993 to provide pastoral oversight for those conscientiously unable to accept the priesthood of women.

Thus, as Bishop Broadhurst said on *Radio Four* the other day: *The Synod has lied to parliament and it has lied to the church*

We must understand clearly what the new draft measure amounts to. It is a plain denial that those unable to accept women priests or bishops have any integrity at all. Dr Habgood's agreeable compromise has been arbitrarily done away with and now, by implication, there is only one integrity in the Church and it belongs exclusively to the supporters of women priests and bishops. But synodical approval for women priests was obtained in 1992 on the proviso that alternative pastoral arrangements be made for those opposed. It was this which ensured that women's ordination became a reality, for it is very likely that many members of Synod would have rejected the innovation if the safeguard of the flying bishops had not been forthcoming.

The integrity which opposes the ordination of women is no mere misogynist whim. It is a theological integrity and it was outlined as long ago as the 1940s by the great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. He said:

*Suppose the reformer begins to say that God is like a good woman. Suppose she says that we might just as well pray to Our Mother which art in heaven as to Our Father. Suppose that the Incarnation might just as well have taken a female form. Suppose the Second Person of the Trinity be as well called Daughter of God as Son of God. Suppose finally that the mystical marriage betwixt 'Christ and his Church' were reversed, that the Church became the Bridegroom and Christ the Bride. All this is involved in the claim that a woman can represent God as priest.*

Lewis concludes devastatingly but incontrovertibly: *If all those supposals were ever carried into effect, we should be embarked on a different religion.*

Well Mr Lewis, they have been and we are.

There is a profound shift in original mystical theology, in the psychology of ritual and in our beliefs concerning the Divine ontology when a female stands at the altar and declares, *This is my body*. These things are not trivial: they go to the heart of Christian apprehension where they actually make the relationship between God and humankind a matter for experimentation .

There are a few things which must be made very plain so that there is no danger of misunderstanding. To claim that women cannot be priests or bishops does not deny ministry to them. We sometimes have women to preach at St Michael's. And not only Christian women. Last week we had a lady Rabbi to preach at the Drapers' Installation Service.

After agonised prayer, Our Lord appointed twelve male apostles. The Gospel says he ordained them. (*St Mark 3:14*). He had warm and close relations with women, and was even accused on occasions of being too friendly with them. But he did not ordain any of them – not even Mary Magdalene, the first witness to his resurrection. We are not at liberty to think that this decision of Our Lord's was just a matter of cultural relativism: as if Jesus were merely primitive and reactionary and stood in need of correction by the militant feminists of our day. He did not ordain any women and so we must assume that there was a reason for his decision.

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 based on biblical and patristic authority.

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. Even such a dyed-in-the-wool liberal as John Stuart Mill understood that democracy is about more than counting heads: it is about ensuring that dissenting minorities have their views represented. Eighteen 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

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 monstrous.

We all have a pretty good idea of who is 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. You won't find one coming into St Michael's – after my retirement – and celebrating the Parish Communion on a Sunday from *The Book of Common Prayer* or reading the lessons at Evensong from *The King James Bible*. They hate those books, almost as much as they hate St Paul.

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 some examples. On Ascension Day a couple of years ago, 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. That such fatuities were the garland bestowed on Christ's glorious Ascension is beyond belief.

I was speaking with another likely candidate one 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 replied, *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*

This promises to bring a new *frisson* to aisle-dancing.

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 enacting some pagan ritual in a woodland glade. Sentimental choruses instead of robust hymns.

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 same sex partnerships. We are already hearing a lot more about light bulbs and carbon footprints. There will be a corresponding dearth of doctrine and theology. For many of 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,

institutional racism and the evils of English history. 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.

Perhaps even so late in the day there is yet hope for those conscientiously opposed to the consecration of women bishops? It is just possible that there are enough members of the Synod who will hold in revulsion the palpable injustice of the proposals in the draft measure when it comes before them in July and refuse to vote for it. This would effectually scupper the whole process leading to the consecration of women – God willing.