

transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:13-16)

Unfortunately, the structures for ministry which now exist in the Church of England make this very difficult where women are ordained as priests. We have divided the church into laity and clergy – a division not found in the Bible, and given all the spiritual privileges and authority to the latter. And where a woman is ordained she almost inevitably has authority over the men around her.

### Overhauling the ministry

It is high time the ministry of the church had a theological overhaul. But within the present structures it would be particularly inappropriate to have a woman as the vicar, rector or priest-in-charge of a church if we expect the assembled church and the home to be properly balanced.

It is hard to imagine how a man who was properly exercising his rôle as husband to his wife and father to his children would have that rôle reinforced and reflected in the communal life of the church with a woman as its lead minister, let alone as its bishop.

### The future and the resolutions

Of course, the early church didn't have the same hierarchy of deacons, priests and bishops as the Church of England does now, though it still limited the rôle of women in the church. Yet these limitations were actually quite minor because the impact of the gospel was so great. Hence women like Euodia and Syntyche worked alongside Paul in gospel ministry (Philippians 4:2-3). Priscilla and her husband Aquila travelled with Paul and jointly educated Apollos when he was a young Christian (Acts 18). Lydia ran a

women's prayer group and seems to have had a church in her house (Acts 16), and so on.

Ironically, it is partly because within the Church of England today so much spiritual power and privilege is wrongly reserved to so few that we must be particularly careful about whom we admit to which office. In a less hierarchical church, more like that found in the New Testament, the natural exercise of ministry in the home and the community would help resolve many of our problems as both men and women enjoyed a proper relationship to one another.

Meanwhile, we must not forget that in the theological sense *all* Christian men and women are priests:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

The professionalising of the 'priesthood' has robbed Christians generally of rights as well as responsibilities. The answer to this, however, is not to give women the same 'privileges' as men, but to restore to God's people what has been lost. Passing Resolution B will not create a perfect biblical church, but it will reinforce the biblical pattern of church and of home.

Revd John P Richardson

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For further reading, see Roger Beckwith, *Elders in Every City: The Origin and Role of the Ordained Ministry*, 2003, Paternoster Press

## Women, men and Ministry

The continuing importance of Resolution B

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*Since the advent of women priests in 1993, very few evangelical Anglican churches have passed 'Resolution B', affirming that they would not have a woman as vicar, rector or priest-in-charge. This leaflet explains why passing this resolution would nevertheless be for the good of the Church.*

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND has had women priests since 1993 and the next few years will see the first women bishops. So isn't it about time the church caught up with the rest of the world — or are things a bit more complicated than that?

In the Bible it is quite clear that although men and women are equal before God, there are limitations on their respective rôles in the church. In the first of his letters to his colleague Timothy, for example, the Apostle Paul wrote what to some eyes looks like a rather stern prohibition:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (1 Timothy 2:12)

Again, in his first letter to the Corinthians he urges that 'the women should keep silent in the churches' (1 Corinthians 14:34)

No wonder Paul has been accused of misogyny! Yet Paul had many female friends and colleagues. At the end of his letter to the Romans, he greets no less

than eleven women, whom he describes variously as fellow-workers, kinsmen and even fellow-prisoners.

The accusation that Paul hated women simply doesn't stand up to the biblical evidence. So why didn't he just let women do exactly what the men did when it came to church?

### What is the 'church'?

One of our problems in understanding this is our over-specialized use of the word 'church'. For many people it means a building. For others, it is an organization. The original meaning of the word, however, is an 'assembly.' In fact it wasn't a specifically religious word at all, but it was applied to the assembly of God's people, particularly when they came together for teaching, prayer and fellowship, and it has stuck.

Of course, church gatherings didn't originally take place in special buildings. People met wherever they could – often in someone's house. So in Romans 16:5 Paul sends greetings to the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila. Similarly, in Colossians 4:15 he greets the church in the house of Nympha (a woman!) and in his letter to Philemon he greets the church in his house.

### Judaism

These 'house' or 'household' churches seem to have been the norm, just as today people gather for home groups where there is space to accommodate everyone. And this would have seemed perfectly natural to people from the Jewish context in which Christianity began.

At the time the Bible was written, as today, the synagogue provided an important focus for the Jewish

community, but the home was just as important. And the pattern of religious life was therefore integrated with rôles within the family.

We see this today when a Jewish family celebrates Sabbath. The table is laid with two candles, bread and wine, remarkably like a Christian celebration of Holy Communion. But it is the wife who lights the candles and recites the first blessing, whilst the husband blesses the bread, breaks it and passes it round the family.

### **Institutionalised Christianity**

Part of our trouble is that Christianity became simultaneously institutionalised and divorced from the Jewish milieu. The church moved from the home to the basilica, styled on the Roman meeting-hall. The synagogue elder became the Christian priest (the word ‘priest’ being derived from *presbyter* or ‘elder’) and the rôles of father and mother were taken over by professional clergy. In fact today it is actually illegal for Anglicans to celebrate Holy Communion in a private house without the bishop’s specific permission, unless it is with someone who is ill – something which the original Jewish Christians would surely have found incomprehensible!

The result is that ministry in the Church of England has been treated like a career structure, with spiritual privileges reserved for the top professionals. People ‘go into the church’, they ‘become clergy’, and movement up the institutional ladder is actually called ‘preferment’.

So of course it seems unfair to discriminate against women in this ‘profession’. We have women doctors

and teachers. We’ve even had a woman Prime Minister, so why not a woman vicar or even Archbishop of Canterbury?

### **The home church**

The problem is, the church is not a profession, it is a community, and the gathered church is an assembly of people who otherwise live together in homes and households. (Even those who live alone grew up in a home of some sort.)

The biblical qualifications of an elder (ie a ‘priest’) therefore stress the quality of home life because this will be reflected in the church: ‘He must manage his own household well ... for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? (1 Timothy 3:4-5, see also Titus 1:6-9).

### **Leading men**

The picture the Bible presents, then, is one where home and church complement one another. Furthermore, it is one where men, as husbands and fathers, are expected to take a lead spiritually. Thus, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, ‘Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. *Fathers*, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged’ (3:20-21, emphasis added).

Underlying all this is the fact that marriage presents to us a model or image of the relationship between God and his people. Hence Paul writes, ‘the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church’ (Ephesians 5:23). And just as this affects relationships in the godly household, so it will affect the gathered church.

### **Weaknesses**

Unfortunately, men and women both

have their particular weaknesses, reflected in the biblical story of Adam and Eve.

Adam was given a simple instruction by God: ‘Eat what you like, but don’t eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ Yet Eve, deceived by the serpent, ate the fruit. Why? Because it seemed to her like a really good idea:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Genesis 3:6)

What mother wouldn’t give her family food like this, despite what the serpent said about God? So she fed some to Adam as well. And what did he do? He ate – and again we may ask why. The Bible simply says he ‘listened to’ his wife (Genesis 3:17). But the phrase means he obeyed her. He went along with her being misled and misleading him.

And it seems from the story in Genesis that these weaknesses become inherent in relationships between men and women. Taken to an extreme, then, a woman’s nurturing character becomes a means to controlling others even while she serves them. Similarly, a man’s acceptance of support and help from a woman can turn into a laziness and acquiescence whereby she becomes simultaneously both his slave and his master.

### **Realism in relationships**

Admittedly, weaknesses which affect intimate relationships matter less where relationships are merely professional or social. But the church isn’t based on merely professional or social relationships. It is a community, and in that community the home and the household matter as much as the larger assembly.

This being the case, therefore, what is done in the assembly should reflect and reinforce what should be happening in the home. And this means being realistic about the particular rôles and the weaknesses of men and women.

### **At their worst**

At their worst, men are spiritually lazy. They are quite happy to ‘do religion’ when this brings them power and status. But the Christian gospel calls them to serve others, not to be served, to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, to find strength through weakness – in fact to be what many regard as unmanly. Thus a man will happily leave ‘church’ to the woman. Like Adam, he will let his wife take the lead, rather than himself listen to God.

Meanwhile, at *their* worst, women can be spiritually undiscerning. Yes, they’ll pray and go to church – but they are more likely than men to be influenced by chat shows and magazines, to read their horoscopes or adopt a ‘New Age’ outlook. Like Eve, they are spiritually deceived by what looks on the surface to be good.

### **Encouragement in the family**

One way we can avoid this in the family is to teach men to be the ‘man of the house’ *spiritually*, and to teach women to allow and encourage this. And it is this desire which seems to lie behind Paul’s instructions. So, for example, when he says in the passage we quoted earlier that he does not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, he relates this to Adam and Eve and to domestic life:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a