

# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *Can you defend the Protestant element in the teachings of the C of E? We are the Catholic Church of this land, reformed from the sad errors of Rome by our Thirty Nine Articles, which were a feature of the Protestant Reformation. But the Bishop of Manchester has called the antics of some American Bishops “more in a Protestant direction”. The eroticised “gay” culture has no connection with Protestantism.*

**Answer:** There are a lot of ideas featuring in this melange of a question. Too many for one answer I fear.

The central issue is why the Bishop of Manchester has used the adjective *Protestant* to describe the American decision to have an openly gay bishop (Gene Robinson- pictured) and elect a woman (Katharine Jefferts Schori -pictured) as their Presiding bishop

What I guess he means by this is that Protestantism started by those wishing to change the faith and practice of the Church. They protested about various issues and eventually, when they had no success in producing change, they formed their own ecclesial organisations, made their own rules, stated their own credo and became the protestant churches. In this respect, the Bishop of Manchester is correct. The American Church is acting against the currently accepted practices of the rest of the Anglican Communion and so the parallel with Protestantism is clear and understood.

This is to use the adjective *Protestant* in a value-free manner. Of course, when it comes to the issues which are dividing Anglicans today, they do not have a similarity of content but the origins

of the disagreements are still the same- how do we interpret and practice the Christian faith?

The deeper questions are – in matters of church and faith, where does authority lie? What about those who wish to remain undecided about some issues rather than accept the decisions of an ecclesiastical authority?

For Roman Catholics, the answer is that authority – magisterium- is given the Bishop of Rome meeting with the College of Cardinals. When he speaks from his throne, or ex cathedra, he speaks with divine authority and doctrines spoken ex cathedra are to be believed by all Roman Catholics from then on.



The Protestants wanted to change this because they saw that it had produced abuses which they wished to avoid. The Protestants wanted to say that the Bible is the ultimate authority for the Christian, not a Pope.

Sounds simple, but in fact it produces a can of worms because it leads to disputes about what happens when people disagree about interpretations of the Bible. Who is right? Who is wrong? How can we tell? What is the test?



The current controversies are not casually to be dismissed as “eroticised gay culture” because that fails to take the issue seriously enough. The issues are more concerned with authority and how to interpret the Bible than sexual and gender matters. The fact that we are in the area of sex and gender brings out all the worst in some people and the knee-jerk reactions on view are very disappointing.

Quite where the Thirty Nine Articles come in is still evading me!

**Neil Richardson**