

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *So, now that the C of E is actually debating the issue at Deanery Synod level, are you in favour of women being consecrated as Bishops in the Church of England, Neil?*

Answer: I can see no sensible objection on biblical, societal or cultural grounds. The only argument against women bishops which I think holds any water at all, I will come to later.

The objections from the evangelicals are based on St. Paul who wrote that women should not have authority over men, but that man is the Head of woman.

You always need to remember two main things when you read the bible. One, it was written a long time ago; two, it was written by men, and mostly old men.

Bearing these two key pointers in mind, we may regard much of what we see in the bible in the form of social teaching as culturally bound to a world view which was held 2000 years ago, at least. It means that we do not have to think the same way as 2000 years ago, but we are free to re-negotiate the message and meaning of our faith in ways which suggest themselves to people in the 21st century.

St. Paul and the other writers never had the opportunity to study the work of Freud or Marx, or Berkeley and Kant, or Wittgenstein. They never got round to looking into the psychology of what it means to be a man or woman, let alone a man or woman in the 21st century. They saw some human behaviours as sin rather than pathologies, or just human choices based on what goes on inside our heads.

As we said back in the 1980s, if we only did what Jesus did in his own life, we would only ordain Jewish men as priests, as he only appointed Jewish men as disciples. And 2000 years ago, the expectations of the role of women was quite different to our own day. Women's position is much more flexible and practical today.

In other fields, it is clear that women have very successfully performed leadership roles, even in a world that is still dominated by men, and not only that, we have all come to value the insights and skills which women bring which are different to those of men.

The same arguments which won the day for the ordination of women as priests will win the day about women as bishops, in my expectation.

So, what argument against holds any water at all?



The argument concerns our self-understanding as a Church. The C of E sees itself as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church with an authority, handed down, literally, as bishops lay hands on priests in ordination. If we want others to take this seriously, we may feel ourselves anxious not to go it alone, but wait for the whole church to come to the same mind.

This is the argument which moves the catholic wing of the Church of England and why some of them have joined the Ordinariate or just simply become Roman Catholics.

The argument is, in the end, not sufficiently cogent to win the day. We have to remember that the RC

church does not recognise the holy orders of a C of E priest as a valid expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church and that will never change. In that sense, they have cut us off, and we may feel free to develop our church in the way we feel best?

On a personal level, I think that admitting women as bishops is the only proper way forward, having once admitted them to the priesthood. Our church will be enriched by all that women bring in their individuality and also in the rich stream of gifts that women have which are different to those of men.

It will be good.

Neil Richardson