

Response to the consultation document GS Misc 1042

1. I endorse the propositions in paras 18,20 and 24, especially as para 24 would preclude any proposals such as the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod being presented to Synod without a chance for full consideration of the consequences.

2. I note that para 29 makes no mention of the consecration of women as bishops, but focuses its attention on those who oppose this. The first objective would more readily reflect the will of General Synod if it read,

‘produce a shorter, simpler measure than the one that was defeated, which enacts the decision of General Synod in July 2006 that admitting women to the episcopate in the Church of England is consonant with the faith of the Church as the Church of England has received it and would be a proper development in proclaiming afresh in this generation the grace and truth of Christ.’

The Working Group seems to have taken as its starting point the position ‘what do opponents of women in the episcopate need in order to feel secure?’ First, it is surely not good practice to have the efficacy of a package of legal instruments measured by how people ‘feel’ as a result? Para 1 of Annex B says that good legislation requires clarity about the policy objectives. ‘Feel secure’ is hardly a robust policy objective. Secondly who defines what is an ‘accepted and valued’ place? To be accepted, all members of the Church of England must surely in their public life be loyal to the Diocesan bishop placed over them, and assent to Canon A4, whatever their private views? The ‘fudge’ over this issue is what has condemned all previous proposals for the consecration of women to the episcopate to failure.

This time, to create a new and positive focus, perhaps the Working Group could use as its starting point, *‘The Church of England wants to consecrate women as members of the College and House of Bishops. How can it do this so that their much-needed gifts will be best used, and so that their ministry will flourish, in ways that affirm the Christian belief that men and women are equally made in the image of God?’*.

3. For the above reasons I do not accept the second objective in para 29 as an acceptable basis on which the Working Group should proceed. .

4. Para 37. I wonder why this proposal has, yet again, been placed at one end of a spectrum? It is not an ‘outlier’ as a proposal. It is precisely the way all other Provinces of the Anglican Communion who have accepted the principle of consecrating women as bishops have proceeded (16 out of 38 of them) and therefore should rather be seen as a well-trodden path which has proved its efficacy in many places elsewhere. Some might say it is insulting to our sister Anglican churches to express their decision to follow this route as an ‘extreme’.

5. Para 40. The language here is telling. ‘Aspirations’ is a word that describes something that is generally currently out-of-reach, and relies on factors outside the control of those seeking the goal. In this context the use of this word is scare-mongering, for we know that it will be the House of Bishops that will hold responsibility for any voluntary arrangements. If they commit themselves to such arrangements, is the Working Party suggesting that they cannot be trusted?

6. Para 46. Let the Working Group be clear on what Parliament has actually indicated very clearly. From the debate in the House of Commons on 12th December 2012:

Simon Hughes, (Member of the Ecclesiastical Committee): *'The bishops need to know in advance ...that what they come up with will not be tripped up in Parliament, and we need to know in advance that it is compatible with our principles of equality'*.

Kate Green *'We on the Labour benches will not accept any solution that entrenches discrimination against women bishops'*.

Second Church Estates Commissioner, Sir Tony Baldry , *'If we are going to have women bishops – everyone has agreed that we are going to have them – they have in every regard to be treated the same as, and have the same powers, rights, privileges and disciplines as their male counterparts. '*

7. Annex B. This whole Annex takes us again into a realm of complexity and potential misunderstanding that surely the House of Bishops has asked us to avoid. To present General Synod with a proposal with subtleties of distinction from a Measure that involve Canons – which bypass Parliament – seems to be putting the power into the hands of those who understand and interpret any such proposals – who tend to be lawyers – rather than straightforwardly in the hands of the members of the General Synod.

Conclusions.

A. It has become clear that the fundamental issue facing the Church of England at this time is not about whether and how to admit women to the College and House of Bishops. It is about whether the Church of England chooses to affirm the equality of women and men under God. If it chooses so to affirm, then women must be made bishops on precisely the same terms of men, and those who dissent must be treated as individual loyal Anglicans but not given special treatment collectively.

If the Church of England chooses not to affirm women and men as equal under God, and chooses to put in place a formal collective space for dissenters, then it needs to be aware of the consequences:

- a common acceptance that the culture of the Church of England demeans women, with all the consequences that follow
- yet further lowering of morale amongst ordained women and those who value and admire their ministry, particularly ordained men
- a dwindling of applications by ordained women for senior appointments
- an erosion of confidence in bishops to face an issue and come down on the side of justice

B. My request therefore is that the Working Group considers the simplest possible legislative package, with no add-ons in other form, with the same rigour as any other potential solution. No previous working party, legislative group or revision committee has had that opportunity, and therefore General Synod has not had the opportunity to express a view on this proposal.

Any proposed solution will see a Final Approval vote in July 2015 at the earliest. Is there ANY good reason why the simplest possible legislation could not proceed as far as completion of the Article 8

reference to the Dioceses by July 2015, with the Final Approval vote being one of the first acts of the new quinquennium of Synod? It would be very odd indeed if such legislation did not receive simple majorities in each House of the current General Synod, given previous voting patterns and the public profile of any debate that is seeking to resolve the current impasse.

C. I suggest that draft legislation setting out in the simplest possible terms that the Church of England shall consecrate women as bishops be presented to the House of Bishops in May, along with a timetable and actions required to give this the best chance of success. No other solution will in the words of the then Bishop of Durham to the November Synod, 'finish the job'.

Hilary Cotton.