

THE SUBMISSION BY WATCH (WOMEN AND THE CHURCH) TO THE BLACKBURN COMMITTEE, 1999 (abbreviated version).

WATCH thanks the Bishop of Blackburn for this opportunity to contribute to the review.

WATCH notes that the review body does not enter the review with a preconception that it will result in proposals to rescind the Act, and this is as it should be. However, we believe the facts will speak for themselves, and lead inevitably to that result. We are sure that the review body would not exclude that outcome either. WATCH believes that the practical and pastoral considerations cannot be divorced from the theological ones; it is the fact that the Act was hastily prepared and is not founded on sound theological considerations that lead to the practical and pastoral failures and objections. The Act was prepared almost exclusively by bishops (men) and in haste, with discussion severely limited, in contrast to the rigorous examination of the decision to ordain women. WATCH is an organisation which 'has a vision of the Church of England as a community of God's people where, regardless of their gender, justice and equality prevail.' The organisation has many members, both men and women, priest and lay. You will particularly note that we not a 'women's organisation', although the pastoral effects of the Act bear most obviously on women. We have ample evidence that many men object to its effects and feel disadvantaged by and ashamed of them. To quote one obvious example there are Dioceses where men (and, of course, women) are rarely selected for posts or promotion if they support the ordination of women.

Ever since the Act was introduced WATCH has consulted with many of its members, and with others interested in this matter, while MOW did the same during the steps that led to the ordination of women. We have received' a number of comments from members since your advertisement of 17th July 1998, in some cases these were copies of remarks sent to you. All these confirm our previous knowledge. Particularly interesting is that we have received several letters from bishops who prefer not to make their views public through your enquiry, but confidentially through WATCH. Over the years WATCH has not only received comments, its leading members have also had to counsel and support people who have been horribly treated by those very people whom the Act protects. It would be pointless to rehearse all these incidents of abuse, insult, mistreatment, and disadvantage that in a secular situation would certainly be actionable under the laws of civilized society dealing with race, age, gender, and so on. it is astonishing that the Church of England accepts such discrimination. Some of the more extreme

cases reach the press and receive widespread public condemnation, to the shame of the Church. In this submission we shall use certain cases as illustrations but we do not suggest that we cover every case of which we are aware.

WHO IS PROTECTED? The first point that must be made is that the whole thrust of the Act is to 'protect' those who are opposed to the ordination of women. From whom? No protection whatsoever is offered to those who take the opposite view, and the Act was developed and drafted in haste and in a wholly one-sided manner.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BISHOPS One bishop tells us that, despite having early on come to a formal arrangement with the local PEV, that arrangement has been absolutely disregarded by the PEV who has operated as an independent bishop directly in contact with the parishes. The position exactly corresponds to that of the local RC bishop and his flock. Those parishes have disregarded their appointed bishop and operate as an independent church under the PEV.

In effect a separate Diocese has been formed with no allegiance to the established church, nor its councils and disciplines. Offers to discuss a way forward have been ignored by the PEV.

The same bishop was concerned that men were being trained in certain colleges, and in their training curacies, with no discussion of the matter of the ordination of women. He had two who came to be ordained by him who, when questioned, disclosed that they had simply followed the pronouncements of their mentors opposing women's ordination without discussion. They had been taught that this was a matter of unquestioned and unquestionable dogma in the Church.

The same bishop was very concerned at the failure of the Act to provide protection for those who supported the ordination of women and who were discriminated against. There were such individuals, sometimes a majority of the congregation, in parishes led by Forward in Faith priests. In other cases one parish was 'protected' whilst several parishes in the group had to bend to their will; the greater part of the group had to accept a Forward in Faith priest, willy nilly. Lastly, where a bishop was against the ordination of women it could and did happen that a majority of people and parishes in his diocese were of the other persuasion; he knew that in some cases bishops had used their powers unfairly. The Act had no mechanism to redress such discrimination.

Another bishop was concerned by the suggestion that PEVs, and assistant bishops acting as PEVs (such as those returning from overseas) were suggesting that they might continue to operate without territorial limits after retirement. It is a long-standing tradition that on retirement a bishop ceases to function as such. This is in order to maintain the authority of each bishop in his diocese. The proposal is unacceptable.

A bishop points out that already one may question the provision that serving bishops and suffragans may operate outside their own diocese in order to service parishes that object to their own bishop. The effect of this is to dispute the authority of the appointed bishop. This is particularly so when the arrangement is made directly with the visitor, and without the involvement of the appointed bishop, as has happened.

We must report that another bishop had found little difficulty, since those very few clergy who had objected initially to the ordination of women had failed to persuade their congregations to follow that line. In nearly every case these priests had accepted their congregation's verdict, even if reluctantly. This bishop was aware of the distress that the few Forward in Faith individuals (priests and laity) felt. With his blessing the local PEV had visited them and celebrated with them from time to time. In one or two cases clergy had presented candidates to the PEV for confirmation without explaining this to the families. This had caused problems but has now ceased. There remained a minuscule number of parishes in his diocese where a PEV operated. The fact that the situation was so exceptional made the Act operable. The bishop said he was aware of the problems faced by bishops with many such parishes.

The Act established a form of discrimination amounting to a suggestion from those opposed to women that some bishops are 'pure' and others are not, even that some are tainted by contact with ordained women at one or more removes. This amounts to setting up a form of apartheid. From it follows:

The loss of the role of the bishop as the focus of unity in his diocese. A diminution in the authority and policy making function of the Diocesan bishop. It is a fudge to say that the PEV only operates with the Diocesan's permission; the Diocesan cannot in practice refuse, and we have reported above that some PEV's disregard the Diocesan's authority and do not even consult him. The opportunity arises for other cases for 'dissent of conscience.' Other groups may, and do,

demand 'their own'- bishop. This is congregationalism and has occurred already in Newcastle. Why should not those who support the ordination of women reject bishops who espouse Forward in Faith or Third Province status? It is difficult for them to relate to such bishops, especially when these bishops set the example of division. The Act has denigrated the very clear decision of the General Synod, taken after many years of discussion and prayer, to ordain women.

The action of those who have persuaded people and parishes to reject the ministry of women has prevented them from experiencing this ministry and has forced them to receive an unwelcome ministry or to leave the parish. Further, they are prevented from receiving the ministry of their Diocesan unless they go to another parish. Finally, other parishes in a group benefice may be forced to accept both priests and bishops whom they cannot love and respect. These effects have important outcomes on the pastoral and practical worship and life of the individuals and parishes. They also affect those who reject the ministry of women; they can easily become an embattled and resentful minority. This is bad for the Church and for them.

RESOLUTIONS A, B and C and their consequences We would draw attention to the way in which Resolutions A, B and C are sometimes in practice arrived at in a parish, and the consequences, not only for the congregation but also for the wider parish population. We have support for these remarks from at least one of the bishops with whom we talked, as well as from individual cases reported to us by priests and laity. How widespread the problem is we cannot tell: there should be a study to find out.

In most parishes that have signed the resolutions it is the priest, or his predecessors, who have led the people to that conclusion. Some congregations have neither had the relevant theology explained to them nor understood it. In other cases the explanation given to them has been partial or biased. (We note that where the attempt to influence them did not always succeed, the priest may have felt alienated from his congregation). The Act does not provide, as it should, for an independent check on such misdirection. We realise that this will be seen by some as interference with the autonomy of a parish priest, but that autonomy can only rest upon trustworthiness.

Some congregations are not actually concerned with theology; they simply want tradition, King James's Bible and the BCP, and for nothing to change. This understandable, though maybe wrong-headed, view has been used to introduce the resolutions. Once again there is no check, as there should be. We are aware that some priests have tried to change such attitudes

unsuccessfully.

Some congregations (PCCs) that sign the resolution do not have their roots in the local community. They have gathered, and sometimes have deliberately been selected, from far and wide to reflect a particular view. At the same time those of the other persuasion have been discouraged, sometimes by deliberate offensiveness. Often it is 'leaders' that are deliberately targeted and that have left - the remainder are then easier to influence. Others have left because they do not care for the argument. Once again there should be safeguards against manipulation. Examples of each of these malpractices have been reported to us. Without the division of the Church into 'two integrities' such malpractices would not have arisen.

We wish to comment too about the method of deciding Resolutions A, B and C. Effectively the PCC does so, and the way in which the PCC does so has been discussed above. Further the decision effectively takes away the church from the local population. They may rarely go to the church but it is theirs and an important part of the local culture and scene. The argument for having so many parish churches revolves about this sense of belonging. The decision to vote on the resolutions should be taken by all those entitled to vote for the churchwardens. This would be particularly important if the day ever comes when a Third Province, or its like, is seriously considered.

SOME MORE GENERAL PROBLEMS We have a report of one parish in which the parish newsletter mentioned the Bishop of Beverley (PEV) and his activities, but did not refer to the Diocese of Southwell in which the parish lies, or its Bishop Patrick

We have reports of cases where priests have manipulated their parish and PCC to achieve their desired result, for example by introducing written items into a mass of PCC papers at the PCC so that it would be impossible to examine these papers and find these items. Also a habit of calling PCC meetings at very short notice when those supporting the ordination of women were away, or others 'must have forgotten' when the meeting was to be.

We do not suggest that such practices are common, but that they do occur and should be noted. More frequently such techniques have not succeeded. Maybe, of course, some enthusiasts for the ordination of women have committed similar excesses. In either case it is unacceptable, and only arises because the Church is divided and some want to achieve that division on their own terms. This is pastorally very upsetting to those involved.

Finally, there is in practice little chance of a community reversing a decision to vote A, B and C, let alone if it joins another 'integrity.' There should be a regular confirmation of the decision.

ECUMENICAL ARRANGEMENTS Several of our correspondents said how distressed they were that the effect of the Act is to rule out any serious rapprochement with those other churches that do ordain women. This is particularly so in the case of the Methodist Church. Our Church seems to be rejecting the Porvoo Agreement, at least in an important part. We recognise, of course, that the Roman Catholic Church is of the other persuasion, but two wrongs cannot make a right.

'When women were ordained priest, we expected that the Church would welcome and affirm us. We were prepared to be charitable and recognised the need for a time of reception - giving parishes and individuals the chance to come to terms with the new situation. We nevertheless believed that the Church of England had made a decision by which it would stand. Instead we discover that the acceptance is half-hearted, grudging, reluctant and based on the premise that the Church might, in fact, be wrong and all we women priests can be disposed of, dispensed with and wiped off the face of history as a temporary aberration! Meanwhile great care is being shown to the needs, feelings and sensitivities of young men opposed to the priesting of women who are preparing for ordination....What is the justification for going on ordaining young men who will not accept women priests? It is one thing to show compassion and concern for older priests who were ordained before the Church of England accepted women priests. It is quite another to perpetuate opposition. . .'

The Rev. Jean Mayland writing in Outlook, the magazine of WATCH, Spring 2001.