

WOMEN BISHOPS: WHAT NOW?

Rod Thomas

Rod Thomas, Chairman of Reform and Member of General Synod's Legislative Steering Group, introduces the new Reform Guide on Women Bishops.

On 17th November, the General Synod finally completed the process which will now allow women to become bishops in the Church of England. By the time this article is published, the first women bishops are likely to have been appointed. So where do these developments leave those of us who believe that, while both men's and women's ministry is vital for the health of the Church, the Bible does not include the leadership of mixed congregations amongst the ministries that women should undertake? Reform has recently produced 'Women Bishops: A Guide for Parishes' and this article reproduces three of its key parts. I do not take credit for these; they represent the contributions of many people.

The first and most obvious implication of the new developments for individuals and PCCs alike is that what may previously have been assumed about male leadership in the Church needs to be made explicit. If a PCC is 'unable to accept the ministry of women bishops' (to use the accepted parlance), then the reasons for taking action will need to be carefully explained to congregations. The general issue may previously have been the subject of sermons and discussion groups, but now that action is required, minds will be that much more focussed. That is why the first part of the new Reform Guide starts by outlining again what we believe the Bible to be teaching. It summarises this by saying that the Bible insists on the equal value of men and women in God's eyes, but also on their different, complementary, roles in the home and the church. These different roles are both built into God's good purposes for his creation and reflective of the relationships between the different members of the Trinity.

The Guide then moves on to explain the provision that has been made for 'traditionalists' before considering the questions PCCs will need to ask themselves in determining how to respond. This article only contains the material relating to the latter. The difficulty we face is that while the provision should enable parishes to receive episcopal ministry from a man rather than a woman, he will be acting in a 'delegated' capacity and only in those areas of church life that have been agreed by a female diocesan. To some these considerations are simply legal technicalities; to others they smack of compromise.

Thirdly and finally, the part dealing with oaths of canonical obedience is reproduced here. I don't think I am giving any momentous secrets away by saying that the paragraphs which touch on this subject in the House of Bishops' Declaration took up hours of discussion in the General Synod's Legislative Steering Group and a number of members struggled to understand exactly what was at stake. However, this is where the whole issue becomes very personal, particularly for ordinands, incumbents and readers.

Extract One: The Bible's Teaching

Male and Female: God's good purposes for his creation.

In Genesis 1 we read that 'God created man and woman in his image...male and female he created them'.¹ Right from the beginning, it is emphasised that we are not created as androgynous beings, but as two different types of human. This is something that we have taken for granted in the past but is now highly controversial. We cannot ignore the growing influence of those who deny the givenness of 'male' and 'female' and instead assert that gender is a social or human construct with any number of possible permutations. Gender is thus 'a state of mind' rather than part of our 'physical being'. When human beings claim they are the creators of their own identity it fatally undermines the relationship between creator and created being.

If, as Genesis teaches, we are created 'male' and 'female' then these two identities are neither the same nor interchangeable. Instead, Genesis 2:18-25 famously sketches out the nature of our mutual relationship.² God searches for a suitable helper for the man, and then creates woman, from his side. God presents her to him, and the man responds, calling her *woman*. It is a picture of delight and openness.

There are clues in the account that there is an order in this relationship. The man is made first, then the woman; she is to be his *helper*; *he* names her *woman*; it is to the man that the commandments about the Garden are given, as if he is responsible. It seems as if God gives the man the lead role - and that is certainly how St Paul understands this passage when he alludes to it in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.

Now this does not, for a moment, imply that the woman has a status any lower than the man: the Hebrew word for *helper* is also used in the Old Testament to refer to God! The clearest way of understanding the role of helper is to see it as referring to women helping men in the task of ruling over God's creation. It doesn't mean helping the man to do

¹ Genesis 1:27.

² It is worth noting that Christ himself understood this account to be the very words of God: see Matthew 19:4-5.

whatever he wants.³ Moreover, the very term *woman* sounds similar in the Hebrew to *man*. There is absolute equality of value; it is their *roles* that are different (in our power-obsessed society, some find it very hard to distinguish these). The important point to note is this: the ordering of man and woman is written into creation, before the Fall; it is not the result of the tragedy that follows.

Genesis 3 tells the wretched story of the entry of sin into the world, as the first man and woman rebel against God. Significantly, the man is held responsible, even though it is the woman who has made the first move.⁴ As God passes sentence on them, he addresses the woman: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”⁵ The likeliest explanation of this verse is that it refers to the ‘battle of the sexes’ between man and woman. Now, in a sinful world, headship is replaced by tyranny, and complementary roles by toxic competition.⁶ What we see - as in all the results of the Fall - is not the establishment of a completely new pattern, but the spoiling of an existing one. There is now so much hurt and pain in the relationship between man and woman that it is painful for us even to talk about it!

Thirdly, in Christ we see the creation pattern restored. The central message of the Bible is, of course, the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. Sins are forgiven; God calls out for himself a people; they are called to walk in newness of life. What does that look like in the context of the order of the relationship between man and woman? The answer is to look back to the Creation order. Order is there - but it is of a Genesis 2 kind, not Genesis 3.

So, in Ephesians 5, we read of God’s pattern for Christian marriage. The husband is the head of the wife; she is called to submit to him; but he is commanded to love her. The model for this is the sacred relationship between Christ and his church, of which marriage turns out to be a beautiful picture.⁷

It is worth noting that the Church of England’s own teaching on marriage has recently acknowledged the different roles of men and women in family life. In 2013, the Faith and Order Commission published, with the agreement of the House of Bishops, a document entitled *Men*

³ See Christopher Ash, *Married for God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007).

⁴ Genesis 3:17.

⁵ Genesis 3:16b.

⁶ The evidence for this is the way the writer uses a very similar expression a few verses later, in Genesis 4:7: ‘Sin desires to have you...’ where clearly its desire is to dominate. Hence the woman’s desire in 3:16b is to ‘have’ her husband in this same way.

⁷ Ephesians 5:21-33; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3, Colossians 5:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-7.

and women in marriage.⁸ It stated that ‘Human relations depend on the encounter of men and women, equally and differently human ...’ (para 12) and referred to the effect of parents on children by saying ‘These various goods rely in different ways on the complementary gifts of men and women’ (para 35).

In his teaching on the ordering of the church, Paul takes a similar “headship” view. The connection is that the church is also a family - indeed, Paul calls it ‘God’s household’.⁹ It is in this context that he says, ‘I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man - she must be silent’.¹⁰ He is referring to a local church, using the language of a family, and wants to see in it the same ordering that is written into creation. The church is called, in its arrangements, to witness to God’s fabulous creation pattern.

In the various debates that have taken place over the years on this subject, Galatians 3:28-29 has often been quoted to support the idea of gender-neutral ministry: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise’ (ESV). Mike Ovey tackled this in the evidence Reform gave to the Rochester Commission on Women in the Episcopate. His point was that these verses weren’t a general statement about gender equality so much as a description of our common inheritance of the blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:

... one violates the principle of Galatians 3:28 if one asserts a difference between human groups which implicitly undermines the adequacy and necessity of Christ’s work in making us heirs of Abraham. It is very far from obvious that this is the case in the question of consecrating women to the episcopate.¹¹

Male and Female: Reflecting the relationships within the Trinity.

The Bible’s teaching on male headship also appears within a different context: 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul talks about how arrangements

⁸ *Men and Women in Marriage: A document from the Faith and Order Commission published with the agreement of the House of Bishops of the Church of England and approved for study* (GS Misc 1046; London: Church House Publishing, 2013).

⁹ 1 Timothy 3:15; see also 3:5, 5:1, 2.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:12. That this does not imply an absolute silence in church is suggested by women praying or prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5. See also 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 (where women are to be silent only when the prophecies are being weighed); Titus 1.

¹¹ See *Women Bishops in the Church of England? A report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party on Women in the Episcopate* (GS 1557; London: Church House Publishing, 2004), p. 152.

within the church of his day needed to reflect God's pattern for authority and submission. As soon as we read the word 'submission' it can conjure up very unhelpful ideas of male dominance – and regrettably this has sometimes been all too evident in the church's history. However, we must not confuse submission with subjugation. 'Submission' can only be given, it cannot be demanded. It is a very godly characteristic, and is something that all Christians should exhibit in different contexts, as 1 Peter makes clear. However, within the domestic family and the church family, women have the particular responsibility of helping the whole church understand what godly submission should look like, just as men have the responsibility for displaying self-sacrificial servant leadership.

In the specific case of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul adds the key further thought that 'the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.' In other words, the Trinity models both equality and submission. The Son is never less than God, yet the Father is his 'head.' This is further emphasized in 1 Corinthians 15:28 where Paul describes Christ's triumph over all his enemies when he comes again and then says: 'When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.' The thrust of these verses is clear: men and women in both natural and church families are to be a visual aid of something that is true of God himself.

Exactly how to put this into practice has been a matter of discussion. How much "headship" is implied by different roles in a church? Where do we draw lines? There is a spectrum of different situations. One thing is clear, however: being a bishop is clearly at the leadership end of that spectrum. Hence John Stott, after a thorough survey of the evidence, said 'I still do not think it biblically appropriate for a woman to become a Rector or a Bishop'.¹² That said, it is vital that churches recognise and encourage appropriate female ministry. Writing in the Reform booklet *The Role of Women in the Local Church*, Carrie Sandom said 'Men are needed to model to other men what it means to be godly ... but only women can model to women what it means to be godly women ... All male church teams are in danger of limiting the effectiveness of their ministry because they cannot adequately model how to live in a godly way to women.'

An Arian Heresy?

During the debates on women bishops, the view was advanced that conservative evangelicals are guilty of the Arian heresy when they speak of Christ being eternally subject to his Father. Arius argued in the fourth

¹² *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshalls, 1984), p. 254. In the fully revised *New Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), p. 316 he said he had still not changed his mind about the ideal arrangement.

century that the Son was inferior to the Father since he believed there was a time when the Son did not exist. Our critics suggest that by speaking of Christ as subject to his Father we are implying he is inferior. However, this view is based on the premise that authority inevitably implies superiority and subordination inevitably implies inferiority. Within the Godhead, however, Christ is both sovereign God, eternally equal in power and authority with the Father and the Spirit, and the obedient, subject, Son, identified with man for all eternity.¹³

Extract Two: Issues Facing PCCs

Appointing female bishops will be a priority

According to the House of Bishops' Declaration, during a vacancy in see, dioceses will now be able to ask for a bishop to be appointed who supports women's ordination.¹⁴

It seems likely that future 'senior' appointments will specifically favour women. William Fittal, the Secretary General to the General Synod told the Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee that 'The positive action remit of the Equality Act is something people will have in mind in the Church now as women are eligible to become bishops for the first time'.¹⁵

This also has consequences for future appointments of conservative evangelicals and anglo-catholics to diocesan posts. Previously, under the Act of Synod, for a diocese to request a bishop who ordains women was viewed as unacceptable discrimination against traditionalists. That will no longer be the case.

Of course, there has been *de facto* discrimination over many years. The Talent and Calling Report was presented to General Synod in 2007. It identified that conservative evangelicals were under represented at 'higher levels' of the Church of England (along with traditional anglo-catholics, women and ethnic minorities) and that something should be done about it. Since then, more than 30 diocesan bishops have been appointed by the CNC and 69 suffragan bishops have been appointed by more than 40 diocesan bishops. Out of those 99 appointments, not one has been given to a man who holds conservative evangelical convictions about the role of women in the church.

¹³ An example of this criticism of conservative evangelicals is Kevin Giles' book: *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006). For a compelling critique of Giles' position, see Constantine R Campbell, 'Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Trinity' *Churchman* 122/4 (2008): pp. 351–60.

¹⁴ GS Misc 1076 Women in the Episcopate - House of Bishops' Declaration 2014 (page 3, para 12).

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10984385/Church-of-England-to-use-positive-discrimination-to-boost-women-bishops.html>, accessed 17/11/14.

The Declaration recognises that the appointment of a complementarian conservative evangelical bishop would help foster trust in the new arrangements and so commits the House to seek to ensure this. Plans are in motion to appoint a single suffragan bishop. It has to be said, however, that this scarcely does justice to our numbers.

Does the PCC believe it is right to make use of the provision?

The main issue that PCCs will need to consider is whether it is appropriate to use the new provision.

There is a strong argument that to do so would compromise the local church's teaching on male headship.

- a. The Church of England has decided that there should now be no legal distinction between men and women either in Measure or Canon. Thus, Canon C18 will apply to a female diocesan bishop in exactly the same way as it does to a male bishop. Canon C18 (1) provides that every bishop is the chief pastor of all that are within his/her diocese, as well laity as clergy, and their father in God (the word father remains unchanged!); Canon C18 (2) provides that every bishop has within his/her diocese jurisdiction as Ordinary; and Canon C18 (4) provides that every bishop is, within his/her diocese, the principal minister, and to him belongs the right... to ...ordain and confirm.
- b. It is not possible under the Declaration to be exempted from a Diocesan bishop's jurisdiction. The argument therefore, is that by agreeing to make use of the Declaration, a PCC will be accepting the position of a female Diocesan bishop as its 'chief pastor' and her ultimate jurisdictional authority. In practice too, it will be the female Diocesan who decides which male bishop a 'resolution' parish will receive and in which areas she will delegate her jurisdiction.
- c. The 'personal' relationship between the bishop and the parish has been placed at the centre of the 'arrangements' for parishes. Resolutions A-C, made under the old Act of Synod, were 'objective' – they were passed and something specific happened. The new 'resolution' is 'subjective' – it is actually a 'request' for the parish to be allowed to engage in a conversation with the bishop in order to come to an appropriate arrangement.
- d. A PCC which decides, as a result of these considerations, not to use the provisions will then be in a state of impaired communion with its bishop(s).

However, the alternative option is for a PCC to make use of the provision – and there are strong arguments here too.

- a. A PCC might decide to use the provision precisely because it enables

- a local church, in faithfulness to Scripture, to model in practice what it preaches, by ensuring that teaching and other ministries are led only by male presbyters or bishops.
- b. The fact that a bishop supplied for this purpose is legally entitled to operate through an instrument of delegation from a female Diocesan bishop is likely to be regarded as less important than securing appropriate Episcopal ministry in practice. PCCs which pass a resolution would recognise the position of the female Diocesan Bishop in law, but would not accept her ministry. The consequence of doing this would be that the PCC would be able to maintain its understanding of Scripture while avoiding further disruption of diocesan relationships and the longer-term difficulties inherent in impaired communion.
 - c. The question that then arises is whether or not such a course of action would represent a compromising acceptance of the female Diocesan bishop's role. PCCs using the provision might take the view that there existed a difference between *being* compromised (i.e. a doctrinal position being undermined) and *accepting* a specific compromise.
 - d. Those who believe it possible to do the latter (ie by using the provision) might well take the view that the legal role of a female Diocesan should not be a communion-breaking issue. The reason for this would be that those with whom they disagree (i.e. proponents of women bishops) have, in a number of cases, argued that the appointment of women bishops is consistent with Scripture. Over the last 20 years, Reform has disagreed with this conclusion, but has failed to persuade its opponents. The issue then is how far this disagreement over the application of Scripture should lead to a breach in communion.
 - e. A PCC which decided to use the provision might conclude that despite the wider Church of England misleading itself over this aspect of biblical interpretation, there were insufficient grounds for impaired communion. If the result had been a fundamental change in our understanding of the Godhead or of sin and salvation, then a breach in communion would be inevitable. However, since the innovation can be seen as an issue of church order, PCCs might decide to use the provisions on offer – however worrying these developments within the Church of England might be for the future.

Another approach would be for a PCC to pursue its concerns with a bishop by basing its requests on the Five Principles of the House of Bishops Declaration without formally initiating the process outlined in the document. The PCC's reason for doing this might be concern that if it initiated the process, either the process itself, or the end result, might entail accepting some element of ministry from the female bishop that was inappropriate on theological grounds.

- a. The fourth of the Five Principles states:

Those who cannot receive the ministry of women bishops or priests for theological reasons continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion and so the Church of England is committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures.

- b. The PCC would acknowledge the legal position of the female Diocesan, but simply request that a male bishop be provided to meet pastoral and sacramental needs since it was unable, on theological grounds, to accept her ministry.

Extract Three: Oaths of Canonical Obedience

What are the implications for taking Oaths?

Whenever a new appointment is made, a person is ordained, or a Lay Reader is licensed a vow has to be taken that the person concerned ‘will pay true and canonical obedience to the Lord Bishop of [Diocese] and his successors in all things lawful and honest.’

The Declaration recognizes that this may raise issues for those who believe in male headship. Essentially, the difficulty is that a promise of obedience sounds like an act of submission that is contrary to the biblical pattern.

Canonical obedience does, of course, depend on what the canons say – and it is here that the first difficulty arises. Since we believe that Scripture clearly teaches male headship in the family and the church, we face the difficult fact that the Canons of the Church of England are now internally contradictory. Canon A4 states that the ordinal is not repugnant to the Word of God and Canon A5 states that doctrine should be grounded in the Holy Scriptures. Thus the consecration of women as bishops should not be possible. However, the new Canon C2(1) states that a woman can be consecrated a bishop and that masculine terms relating to bishops in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordinal are construed as including the feminine. They cannot all be right. The new Canon C29 further complicates matters by referring to the House of Bishops’ Declaration – which only exists because there are those who believe that Canon C2(1) is repugnant to the Word of God.

The argument for refusing to take such a vow is that, whatever the possibilities for securing male oversight, such a vow negates a commitment to male headship. The wording of the *BCP* Ordinal appears to underline this when it asks ‘Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and

submitting yourselves to their godly judgments?’ There is also the question of whether it is possible to take a vow to obey contradictory Canons.

However, there is also an argument for agreeing to take the vow. The Declaration says that the vow adds nothing legally to the duty of canonical obedience and simply reflects ‘a pattern of relationships’ underpinning people’s ministries. It concludes that in the light of the five guiding principles, ‘the giving and receiving of the oath does not entail acting contrary to theological conviction.’ The question is: how can that be so? One answer given in the past was that the vow is primarily directed at the office of the bishop; it is not a personal vow, since it applies to whoever holds the office both at the time of making the vow and in the future. However, in the light of the Declaration, it is possible to add a further possible clarification. This is that as a result of the vow being related only to ‘canonical obedience,’ it is clear that any personal form the vow takes will be in accord with canon – and Canon C29 explicitly provides for those who cannot accept the spiritual oversight of women. This means that in taking the vow, the person concerned is not agreeing to obey a female bishop in any area where his theological convictions on this matter would be threatened.

Further Material

The House of Bishops’ *Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests* can be downloaded from the Church of England website or hard copies are available from Church House. It is published as GS Misc 1076.

The *Guidance Note* from the House of Bishops on its Declaration can likewise be downloaded from the Church of England website or hard copies are available from Church House. It is published as GS Misc 1077.

Useful material setting out the complementarian approach to male headship can be found in the evidence submitted to the Rochester Commission. This can be found on pages 148-156 of *Women Bishops in the Church of England? A report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party on Women in the Episcopate* (Church House Publishing, GS 1557)

APPENDIX A

A Letter Sent by the Chester Association¹⁶ to the Bishop of Chester in July 2014

Dear Bishop Peter,

We are writing to you as members of the Chester Association in the light of the decision of General Synod this week to pass the women bishop’s legislation.

¹⁶ The Chester Association is a group of evangelicals in the Chester Diocese.

Although this was not a surprise to anyone, it causes us great distress. Our response will not, in turn, be a surprise to you, since you have taken care to pastor us and hear our concerns, for which we remain grateful. Nevertheless, we wanted to register our response with you and would be grateful if you might leave this letter on file for any future Bishop of Chester.

Clearly we feel more personally vulnerable as the Established Church further distances itself from our theological position. Much deeper than this, however, our distress arises from a decision to count as lawful that which is ‘contrary to God’s Word written’ (Article XX).

We are sometimes described as “headship evangelicals”. Rather, we see ourselves as orthodox Christians who discern in the Scriptures – with the majority of biblical commentators though the ages of the church – love and order revealed in the Godhead itself, and re-established as the pattern among the redeemed people of God.

The Father and Son love each other, yet this love is expressed asymmetrically. The Son’s love is marked by a willing and joyful submission to his Father’s will, as when Jesus says, ‘I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me’ (John 14:31). In Gethsemane, Jesus prays, ‘not as I will, but as you will.’ (Matthew 26:39) To insist, as some now do, that the relationship between the persons of the Trinity is purely egalitarian is to refuse the witness of Scripture, and ultimately to undo the gospel itself.

It seems therefore to us entirely expected that as we are brought in Christ to know the Father so our own relationships are renewed in patterns of mutual love, asymmetrically expressed. This seems to be Paul’s starting point in 1 Corinthians 11:3: ‘Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.’ Does this demean woman under the headship of man? Surely, Paul would say, no more than it demeans Christ under the headship of his Father – which is clearly impossible in the perfect love of the Trinity.

From this flows quite naturally the applications drawn in other Scriptures – in marriage, family life and the workplace (for example, Ephesians 5:21-6:9) and in the life and leadership patterns of the local church family. In terms of the latter, Paul’s first letter to Timothy is perhaps the clearest in application. It is written so that we ‘will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household’ (3:15) which sets the context for Paul’s much-maligned earlier instruction, namely, ‘I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man ... the overseer [literally *episkopos*, traditionally *bishop*] must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife’ (2:12, 3:2). In Paul’s argument, this pattern is rooted in the created order. Christ came to restore and redeem us to this

pattern. It is therefore not a passing cultural captivity, but represents Christ's enduring command to his disciples.

To legislate for the appointment of women bishops is, therefore, to act contrary to God's word written. We are not writing to declare any impending action, or to ask you to take any action. We simply wish to register that our conviction about these things is not novel or transitory, peripheral or secondary.

Please continue to pray for us, as we do for you, in these troubled times. We look forward to welcoming you to our meeting in November.

With all good wishes in Christ.

APPENDIX B

Outline of some theological considerations a PCC might wish to express

1. Parishes may wish to start their description of their theological convictions by explaining the basis on which they believe in male headship. This leads to the conclusion that those who have the responsibility for overall leadership in the local church should be male.
2. However, parishes should also emphasize that it is not enough just that incumbents and bishops should be male. They need to share the same doctrinal position. This is because the New Testament emphasizes the teaching responsibilities of leaders. 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an overseer must 'be able to teach' and the content of that teaching is, according to 1 Timothy 4:11 'these things' which includes the instructions about women's ministry in chapters 2 and 5. Likewise, Titus is charged to 'appoint elders in every town' (Titus 1:5) and one of the key qualifications of an elder is that 'he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it' (Titus 1:9). This means that incumbents and bishops must be willing to teach the gospel faithfully and expound God's Word, including what is said about male headship.
3. This does not mean that women have no teaching responsibilities; Titus 2:4 refers to their teaching role in relation to other women. However, the responsibility for teaching mixed congregations of adults is male.
4. It may be suggested that the content of a bishop's teaching has never in the past been an obstacle to a parish accepting his ministry. While this is in fact not the case, the issue has arisen with particular force since it became possible for women to become bishops. Prior to that, whatever a bishop actually said, there was a common Church of England doctrinal position. If a bishop departed from that, he

personally could be regarded as being in error, without his role as part of church order being prejudiced. That is no longer the case. There are, as the 'Five Guiding Principles' make clear, different theological outlooks within the Church of England. A Bishop cannot share the spiritual oversight of a congregation if he is opposed to their convictions over the Bible's teaching.

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