



WATCH TRAINING DAY

Issues of Women as Bishops

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” So begins the first chapter of the first book of the Bible.

Towards the end of that chapter, on the sixth day, *“God said, ‘let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them.”*

Three questions:

Q. Who are we in creation?

About God: the earth came into being by the action of the Spirit of God.

Two points: God’s Spirit was moving then – is God’s Spirit still moving?

Let **US** make humankind in our image. This is a hint from the Old Testament of an understanding of God that is largely developed from the New Testament, that is, God as the Three in One, the Trinity. All are invited into the life of the Trinity.

The Trinity is characterised by the endless giving and receiving of love. The Three Persons of the Trinity are individual and yet inter-dependent. Augustine, and others, wrote that there was no hierarchy in the Trinity, and that the fullness of the Divine can be seen in each of the Persons. Thus we have the image of the Divine Dance, and of a God whose very nature exists as relationship.

We are God’s creation and, males and females together, the whole of humanity has been made in the image of God. We are a new creation: 11 Cor 5:17. We have a message and ministry of reconciliation.

Q. Who are we in baptism?

“As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

If we have been baptised into Christ we have put on Christ. We are one in Christ Jesus, and our unity cuts across human divisions, such as ethnicity, class and gender.

See 1 Cor 12: 12-13

Do we think that God has a special relationship with men?

As Una Kroll famously said of women, ‘Either ordain us or don’t baptise us!’

Q. Who are we in the life of the Spirit?

A. part of the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. 1 Corinthians 12. Romans 7:6, 8:1; 8:1; Ephesians 4

In 1 Corinthians ch 12, were the gifts of the Spirit distributed differently to men and women? Were the gifts of the Holy Spirit given according to the gender of a person? See also Phillip's four daughters who prophesied: Acts 21:9

Women were the overseers of house churches: Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40); Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12-17); Chloe (1 Cor 1:11). Nympha (Col 4:15), Priscilla, and Aquila (Rom 16:3-5, Acts 18, 1 Cor 16:19) were evangelists who became overseers of a house church; Phoebe was a deacon (Rom 16:1) etc.

Paul lists Junia, (Romans 16) as a prominent apostle. Early translators would not accept that Paul could have been referring to a woman, so they changed the name to Junius. Scholarship now accepts the name as originally being Junia.

Tradition is dynamic!

Patterns of ministry and patterns of involvement of men and women in leadership and oversight have not been fixed throughout the history of the church, but developed and changed as the centuries passed.

Many of the decisions of the early church were mission-driven, and some were intended to prevent the institution of the church from becoming a stumbling block or an embarrassment to those to whom the folly of the gospel was preached. This led to the focus on male Episcopal leadership.

Women used to baptise, and teach, because in an ancient document called the Teaching of the Apostles, it says that they do not counsel that women should baptize or teach because "the pagans will mock and scoff". In other historical documents women are exercising oversight and it was stated that they were ordained.

Q. What are our mission imperatives today?

At heart, the issue is not about ordination, but about how the Church views and values women. It is about what we understand about God's relationship with humankind.

When the Church of England opens episcopate to women it will not only be declaring that women can be bishops, it will be making a statement about the nature and value of all women, lay and ordained, Anglican and non-Anglican, Christian and non-Christian.

What type of Church do we want to be?

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