

An Inclusive Ministry or a Ministry that Excludes?

Is allowing women to minister as bishops and priests really 'inclusive'?

It may 'include' women who have been ordained as bishops and priests. But it excludes from our church's worship far larger numbers of lay women and men who are unable, for reasons of theological conviction, to receive the ministry of women as priests or as bishops (either directly or by receiving the ministry of men and women whom female bishops ordain).

To be present when a woman presides at the Eucharist can be painful, because this visible mark of the Church's disunity conflicts with the nature of the Sacrament of unity.

To receive communion when a woman (or a man ordained by a woman) presides at the Eucharist is to condone and share in something that hinders the visible unity for which Our Lord prayed.

'Inclusion' at the altar excludes faithful women and men in the congregation.

Sacramental Assurance?

Many women and men are unable to receive communion when a woman, or a man ordained by a woman, presides at the Eucharist, because of a lack of 'sacramental assurance'.

In the fourth of the *Tracts for the Times* (the series of pamphlets that in 1833 initiated the Oxford Movement which grew into in the Church of England's Catholic Movement), John Keble wrote of the need for 'security...', that in receiving this bread and wine, I verily receive [Christ's] Body and Blood'.

For many, this 'sacramental assurance' is lacking when the president at the Eucharist is someone whose ministry does not stand in visible continuity with that of the Church through the ages, but instead reflects a change in Holy Orders that lacks catholic consent.

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Women as Bishops and Priests What's the Problem?

Women have exercised ministry and leadership in the Church since the earliest times. They are among her foremost saints and teachers. They hold positions of authority: for example, they are churchwardens and PCC members, chair diocesan and national committees, and sit as judges in the church courts.

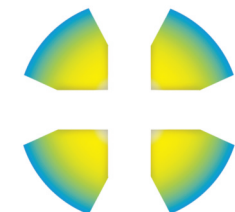
So why is there a problem with ordaining women as bishops and priests?

The reasons fall into three groups:

- ✘ reasons concerning the nature of the Church of England as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church
- ✘ reasons concerning the unity of the Church
- ✘ reasons concerning the nature of the episcopate and priesthood, and the roles of women and men.

For further reading, see

www.forwardinfaith.com/resources



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Part of the One Church?

The Church of England is 'part of the one, holy catholic Church'.

She professes the faith set forth in the catholic creeds. These are the property of the whole Church. The Church of England is not at liberty to alter the Creeds unilaterally. To do so would be to behave as if she were the whole Church, and not merely one part. Things that concern the whole Church must be decided by the whole Church.

The threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons similarly belongs to the whole Church. The Church of England cannot claim the right to make a fundamental change to it unilaterally. Doing so goes against her nature as merely part of the one Church.

Ordaining women to the episcopate and priesthood lacks any precedent in the history of orthodox Christianity. It also lacks 'catholic consent' – the consent of the great majority of the universal Church with which the Church of England claims to share the threefold ministry. It is not a change that the Church of England is at liberty to make.

Contribution to Visible Unity or Visible Sign of Disunity?

The Church of England has committed itself to seek and promote the visible unity of Christ's Church, in obedience to his prayer 'that they may all be one... so that the world may believe...' (John 17.21).

The Church's disunity is contrary to Christ's will. Ordaining women to the episcopate and priesthood further entrenches disunity, when we should be doing all that we can to overcome it. (The Roman Catholic Church has repeatedly described it as placing a 'serious obstacle' in the way.) It also has grave consequences for the Church of England's own unity.

When a woman presides at the Eucharist, or a female bishop ordains, these can only be visible signs of the Church's disunity – signs that contradict the nature of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity.

In saying this, we mean no disrespect to those who offer themselves for these ministries faithfully and obediently according to their own consciences.

Equal or Interchangeable?

Jesus did not shrink from challenging social convention. His disciples included women as well as men. Yet he chose only men as his Apostles. Only men were among the Twelve, representing in the Church (the new Israel) the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob. Bishops are the successors of the Apostles.

In the New Testament, Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is his Bride. Priests represent Christ at the altar.

A bishop is a 'Father in God'. This role relates to the fatherhood of God. (Christ and the Scriptures teach us to call God our Father – never our Mother).

Women and men are equal, but in the roles of father and mother, bride and bridegroom, and in Christian symbolism, they are not interchangeable.

Ordaining women as bishops and priests overturns the tradition of Christian symbolism that is rooted in the Old Testament, the teaching and example of Christ, and the message of the New Testament.