

- Why are *there still those who oppose the ordination of women as priests* in the Anglican Church of Australia?
- Are they *hopelessly out of touch with reality, or do they have something important to say?*
- What might *be the effects of consecrating women as bishops?*
- What does the Bible say? Why *bother about the Bible* anyway?
- Were Jesus and the apostles *culturally conditioned in this matter, or did they see through to a reality that remains unchanged?*

Whether you agree with the conclusions of this little booklet or not, you will find it helpful in setting out some of the issues. It may even challenge a few of your pet assumptions, and cause you to rethink!

Martin Bleby is an Anglican priest with twenty-seven years of country, outback and suburban parish ministry in South Australia, with a passion for teaching the Scriptures. He has now taken up a Bible-teaching ministry at the service of all the churches with New Creation Teaching Ministry, based at Coromandel East in the Adelaide hills.

# God- engendered glory!

Women as priests and bishops?

*Martin Bleby*

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Women as priests and bishops?

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# **PROLOGUE**

## **from the back pew**

It was different for me, sitting unrobed right in the back pew of the Cathedral.

Normally at ordinations I was in the choir stalls with the other clergy, wearing the distinctive robes of our calling, singing my heart out, and rejoicing over the newly-ordained who were coming to join us in this God-given ministry of word and sacrament.

This time I felt a sad measure of detachment. For this was the first ordination I had attended at which women were being ordained as priests in the Anglican Church of Australia. The second such occasion in this Cathedral, I had avoided the first one by attending the ordination of a male friend of mine in a neighbouring diocese at the same time. But now I was here.

'Good people,' the bishop was saying, 'if you know of any obstacle...in any of these persons, such as would bar them from being received into this holy ministry, come forward in the name of God and reveal what the...obstacle is.' An appropriate and dignified public protest had been made by Bishop Renfrey at the first such ordination a year before. I had given the keynote speech against the ordination of women as priests at the Synod some years earlier that had passed the legislation to enable this to happen. 'I am convinced,' I had said, 'that both men and women are called by God together to ministry in the Church. And I am not convinced that women are called to the specific ministry of 'elder' (what we call 'priest').' Should I object again at this point? Perhaps it would be churlish to protest every time and so spoil the women's special day. I knew that the objection would be answered according to the Appellate Tribunal's interpretation of the Constitution, and the ordination would be proceeded with anyway. So I remained silent. I prayed for these brothers and sisters with whom I would be in ministry. I did not say 'Amen' to the prayer ordaining the women as priests, nor did I feel able to join in the applause. In this quiet way I expressed my personal

sadness at not being able wholeheartedly to support what was happening. I still believed that we had made a mistake. I still felt the Church was not doing itself or the women a favour by trying to put them in this position. I greeted each one personally afterwards—some of them were my friends—and wished them God's blessing in their ministry.

But what now? If the point is an important one, that still needs to be made, how should we go about it? Should we resort to the tactics used by the women and their sympathisers before all this happened: political lobbying, banners hung from the gallery inside the Cathedral, and demonstrations and vigils outside? Convinced as I was, I had never felt passionate about it. I had mentioned it occasionally in sermons, and had written one or two articles in the parish magazine—I had addressed it as it arose in the life of the church and needed to be decided upon—but I had never made an issue of it, or sought to impose my views on members of the congregation. If what we are saying is true, then no doubt the truth will reassert itself in time. Events have now moved on, and few want to hear about it any more. But perhaps after the dust has settled, there may be some ears and hearts still open to the issues involved, and willing to receive good teaching. To such these words are offered.

*Martin Bleby*

*Walkerville, S.A.  
September 1997*

# What does the Bible say?

## Why the Bible?

If as a Church we were free simply to determine our own destiny, then we could do what we liked. We could make up our own minds what kind of ministry we wanted, and who could exercise it. But such is not the case in the Anglican Church of Australia:

*This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.*

*This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer his sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.*

*(The Constitution of The Anglican Church of Australia, Fundamental Declarations 2 and 3)*

The Constitution also declares that the 'Book of Common Prayer, together with the Thirty-nine Articles, be regarded as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this church, and no alteration...shall contravene any principle of doctrine and worship laid down in such standard' (Ruling Principles 4).

Article XX says 'it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.' We are not able to pick and choose in this matter, nor can we play one part of the Bible off against another.

With regard to the ordained ministry, the Ordinal included in the Book of Common Prayer makes it clear that the Anglican Church intends to continue the orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons from the Apostles' time as found in 'holy Scripture and the ancient Authors'. So we must look to the Bible to determine what these ministries are, and how they are to be exercised.

It could be argued that the Appellate Tribunal has already settled this matter with regard to the ordination of women as priests and bishops in its ruling in 1991. It is interesting, however, that the foremost biblical scholar on the Tribunal,

Archbishop Donald Robinson, dissented from that ruling. If, as Article XXI states, whole general councils of the Church may err, then it is possible also that the Appellate Tribunal may have been mistaken.

In any account, the Scriptures do not have authority in the church because the Constitution says so. The Constitution simply acknowledges the authority that the Scriptures have always had in the church, as the revelation of the word of God in our midst. The church is subject to the Bible. So our concern must be with what the Bible says.

### **A Command of the Lord**

Let us begin with 1 Corinthians 14: 33b–36:

*As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?*

We do not know the exact circumstances to which these words were addressed. It appears women may have been calling out or interrupting the course of the gathering, or taking it upon themselves to speak in an insubordinate way. But note that this is a general principle, which applies ‘in all the churches’.

Verse 37 adds:

*what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.*

We have no record in the gospels of Jesus giving such a command during his earthly ministry. It is likely that what is meant here is that this is a command of the risen ascended Lord who has authority over all things and is ruling personally over the life of the church in the present (as in Matthew 28:18, Mark 16:20, Revelation 1:9–3:22). It is also seen to be supported by the Old Testament instruction (‘as the law also says’ eg in Numbers 30, where the father or husband is given a protective role towards the daughter or wife in religious matters. Esther 1:17–20 also advises that women should give honour rather than contempt to their husbands).

On the face of it, this would appear to be a blanket prohibition against women ever speaking in a church gathering. But, in keeping with our principle that we should not ‘so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another’, we need to see what else is said. We also need to allow that the New Testament writers spoke with consistent integrity on these matters. Earlier in the same chapter, the apostle Paul says,

*I would like you all to speak in tongues...to prophesy...you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.*

*(1 Corinthians 14:5, 31)*

Paul once stayed with Philip the evangelist in Ceasarea, who ‘had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied’ (Acts 21:8–9). We see from the appreciative greetings in Romans 16:1–16 that Paul was glad to work alongside men and women together, and to receive their ministry.

### **Under Right Authority**

So women are not enjoined to total silence in the church gathering. Women may speak, pray and prophesy as well as men. But they are to do so under right authority. This is the import of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, where a woman is bidden to wear a veil on her head in the church gathering. The word for veil in verse 10 is literally ‘authority’:

*a woman ought to have authority on her head.*

The wearing of the veil was a cultural symbol at that time of a woman being under her father’s or husband’s protecting and caring authority, and so a sign of the security of her position and freedom in society. Not to wear a veil was equivalent to being a ‘loose’ woman on her own, such as an adulteress or a prostitute, for whom was reserved the shameful treatment of having her head shaved:

*any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. (1 Corinthians 11:5–6)*

Cultural symbols vary in different times and places. (For instance, in Australia for a woman to come to church bare-breasted, as a sign of her ‘freedom’, would be shameful and offensive. But in Papua New Guinea it is quite normal, and

happens all the time.) So outward expressions may change: it may legitimately be a non-issue for us now whether men or women cover their heads in worship or not. As we shall see (in 1 Peter 3:1–6, p. 12 below), true submission and freedom is an inner thing of the heart. But the principle remains the same. A woman is to speak—pray or prophesy—from the secure position of being subordinate to the loving, caring, protecting authority of her father, her husband, or the church elder. It is not for her, or anyone else, to reverse that order, or to speak outside of it.

## The Oneness

Note what is said in 1 Corinthians 11:3:

*the man is the head of the woman.*

The first, and the most overlooked, implication of this is that the man and the woman are one. Just as head and body are one entity. A body without a head is not a body. A head severed from the body is a dead head.

As head and body, man and woman are one, not by the coming together of two separate entities into a unity, but by a prior affinity and belonging. This is the import of the man's exclamation in Genesis 2:23:

*“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man.”*

The writer goes on to say,

*Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)*

Man and woman are made *from* one, to *be* one. Jesus adds the comment,

*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. (Mark 10:8)*

Jesus concludes

*Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:9)*

He does not say, as misquoted in the marriage service, ‘*Those whom* God has joined together...’ The ‘what’ here is singular. Man and woman together are a single entity.

This is said in the context of marriage between a man and a woman. But in the light of that prior creational affinity and

belonging, it can be seen to be true of men and women in all their relationships across the whole of humanity.

Man and woman are one also *because* they are a head and a body together. Two heads, or two bodies, could never be a unity. Man and woman are a unity because they are a head and a body together. In God, and in humanity made in the image of God, true unity and love are not opposed to authority and submission. They are one and the same thing.

## The Headship

So men and women are not separate, as equal and opposite poles. Nor do they stand alone. The full context of 1 Corinthians 11:3 is this:

*I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.*

The man and the woman are one with each other, in the same way that we are one with Christ, and Christ is one with the Father. The man and woman relate with each other, in the light of these ordered relationships of unity and love, in authority and submission, that already exist between God and Christ, and between Christ and the man and the woman together.

God is the head of Christ: Christ is one with the Father, and derives his being and authority from the Father, and is gladly subject to Him (see John 10:30, 3:35, 16:15a, 8:28).

Christ is the head of every man: each man derives his being and authority from God via Christ, and is privileged to be joined in submission to him. (The creation story in Genesis 2:7 depicts the man as being formed ‘from the dust of the ground: the man is not worth much of himself, except that he has the breath of life breathed into him by God, and remains in total dependence on God for ‘life and breath and all things’—see Acts 17:25.)

The man is the head of the woman: she derives her being and authority from God via the man, and is one with the man under the man's headship. (In the picture-language of Genesis 2:21–22, the creation of the woman is seen to be a direct and special action of God, in which the man plays no conscious part, but in which he is very much involved. The LORD God puts the man into a ‘deep sleep’, and takes a ‘rib’

from the man, and forms it into a woman. This is a subtle picture of how the woman is related both to God and to the man—see further below, p. 14)

Together the man and the woman are united with and subject to Christ, and Christ's relationship with them is the pattern for the man and the woman's relationship with each other. (In Ephesians 5:21–33, the relationship between husband and wife is seen entirely in the light of Christ's saving, loving, self-giving, redeeming, cleansing, nourishing and caring relationship with us, and of our oneness in glad submission in all things to him. Just as a man loves, nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, so is Christ towards his body the church, and so a husband is to love his wife as he loves and cares for himself.)

In this way we are all truly one with each other and with God; not one set over against the other.

Note that in this the apostle is basing what he says not on current cultural norms of the day but on the creational order—the very way we are made and structured by God as men and women from the beginning.

In this order there is an intimate mutuality and interdependence. Referring to the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, where the woman is made from the man as a fitting companion and helper for him, the apostle says:

in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman.

And he sets it in context by going on to say:

all things come from God. (1 Corinthians 11: 9–12)

## The Glory

The apostle Paul goes on to point out that, as this order is held to, then the man and the woman have true glory from God. God's glory is His inner being and nature shining out for all to experience.

'God is the head of Christ,' and 'in the face of Jesus Christ' we have 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

'Christ is the head of every man,' and the man is 'the image and glory of God' (1 Corinthians 11:3, 7, compare Genesis 1:27).

'The man is the head of the woman' and the woman is 'the glory of man' (1 Corinthians 11:3, 7).

So the woman is the glory of the man, who is the glory of Christ, who is the glory of God. In other words, if you want to see where the glory of God is most evident in all God's creation, look at the woman.

The practical outcome of this 'glory' is seen in Proverbs 31:10–31, where a woman who rightly relates with her husband, and with God, is one who is strong and free: to love her husband, care for her family, and dress herself well, to order her household, manage her employees, and to hold her own in the world of property, finance, primary and secondary industry, and commerce, and in service to the community:

A capable wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant,  
she brings her food from far away.

She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her servant girls.

She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength,  
and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.

She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the city gates,

taking his seat among the elders of the land.  
 She makes linen garments and sells them;  
 she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
 Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
 and she laughs at the time to come.  
 She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
 and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
 She looks well to the ways of her household,  
 and does not eat the bread of idleness.  
 Her children rise up and call her happy;  
 her husband too, and he praises her:  
 “Many women have done excellently,  
 but you surpass them all.”  
 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
 but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.  
 Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
 and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Here is woman as she is found in the Bible—no wimp or doormat, but as strong, upright, beautiful, dynamic, free and secure as a great city (see Song of Songs 6:4, Revelation 21:2, 9–27, 3:1–5).

### The Imperishable Jewel

It is interesting that, as far as leadership in the word of God is concerned, there is a silence enjoined on the woman in the home as well as in the church:

Wives...accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, and wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you. (1 Peter 3:1–6)

Note that the wife is to remain silent on matters of faith even, or especially, when living with an unconverted husband. Perhaps this is because, in Ephesians 6:4, it is the *fathers* who are told to bring up their children ‘in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.’ Not that the mothers do not also have a part to play in this (see Proverbs 31:26 above, p.10), but it appears to be the husband's responsibility to head this up in the home. Whether he is

doing it well or not, for the wife to take this out of his hands could be to un-man him, and to hinder him from becoming the husband and father he is meant to be under the Lord's hand. Besides, God has given her something much more powerful than the spoken word. Christ dwelling in her heart has endowed her with a beauty and a peace and a purity of spirit that is almost irresistibly attractive. It is this ‘hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious’, and which fears nothing, that denotes most clearly the nature and strength of the woman's true ministry.

### Elders in the Church

In the churches of the New Testament we find a number of elders. These include women, with a special ministry particularly to other women:

Tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. (Titus 2:3–5)

But there were among the elders those who *ruled* through labouring in *preaching* and *teaching*, who were to be especially honoured and remunerated in the church:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The labourer deserves to be paid.” (1 Timothy 5: 17–18)

These are the ones who held the position of an elder/pastor-teacher/overseer, with *leadership in the word of God*, that we read about in 1 Timothy 3:1–7

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of overseer desires a noble task. Now an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children respectful and submissive in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by others, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5–9 counts such an overseer as equivalent to or as one of the elders:

I left you in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint *elders* in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, husband of one wife, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For an *overseer*, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy according to the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

These elders or overseers are what the Anglican church now calls 'priests' and 'bishops'. These are men ('the husband of one wife'), and it is this ministry that is not given to women:

I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:8–14)

The passage then goes on to talk about the ministry of a (male) overseer (1 Timothy 3:1–7—see above, p. 11).

Note the parallels with the passage about relationships and responsibilities in the home in 1 Peter 3:1–8 (above, p. 10). Submission and headship in home and church are all of a piece.

Again the creational relationships are affirmed, as in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9. And again it is said later that these are 'the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Timothy 6:3, compare 1 Corinthians 14:37, p. 4 above).

Note also that women are to *learn*. This is a radical departure from the practice of the synagogue at the time, where men only were expected to take an interest in these things. This change, instituted by Jesus (as when, for example, he taught Mary and Martha—see Luke 10:38–42), was in keeping with God's original intention that men, women and children should learn together from the law of God (as in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, Nehemiah 8:1–3).

## Is this Culturally Conditioned?

One of the loudest arguments against taking these passages seriously today is that Jesus, in choosing twelve men as his apostles, and the apostles, in appointing men to positions of leadership in the word of God, were simply following the cultural norms of their time, which no longer apply today.

There are a couple of things that can be said about that. Firstly, was society at that time so universally subjected to patriarchal dominance as people make out? We find in the New Testament a number of women of position and substance in the community, who appear to be strong, free and responsible leaders in their own households, and in command of considerable resources, much after the manner of the good wife in Proverbs 31: women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna (Luke 8:1–3), Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome (Mark 15:40–41), Tabitha or Dorcas of Joppa (Acts 9:36), Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:11–15, 40), Priscilla, with her husband Aquila (Acts 18:1–3, 18, 24–28, Romans 16:3–5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19), Phoebe the deacon of Cenchreae, and other women mentioned with her: Mary, Junia with Andronicus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus's mother and Nereus's sister, and Julia (Romans 16:1–16). There were also the influential 'devout women of high standing' in Antioch of Pisidia who, with the leading men of the city, were able to get Paul driven out of the region. Many of these leading women exercised valuable and effective ministry in the church. The apostles worked alongside them in warm and affectionate unity, and were glad to receive ministry from them. But none of these women, as far as we can see, were appointed to the position of a ruling elder with leadership in the word of God by preaching and teaching. So it would appear that such an appointment was made on other grounds besides just a person's ability and standing in the community.

Secondly, as pointed out above, the apostle, in setting out the relationship between God and men and women, was not basing what he said on the cultural norms of the time, but on the created order from the beginning. Both Jesus and Paul were well able to stand against cultural norms if need be: Jesus in his teaching of women and having them travel with

him freely and openly, and Paul against his countrymen on whether non-Jewish Christians needed to be circumcised. Yet Jesus still chose twelve men to head up the kingdom as his apostles (see Luke 6:12–16, 22:28–30). And the apostle Paul, while able and willing to accommodate to cultural norms when necessary (see 1 Corinthians 9:19–23), in this matter appealed, not to cultural norms, but to the way we are made by God. Cultural norms change, but the way we are made remains constant.

### Proper Covering

How are we to understand why this creational order and unity should be so? Let us go back to the word-picture in Genesis 2:21–22 that subtly sets out the relationship between the woman and God and the man:

The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

We have already pointed out that this makes the woman a special creation by God, in which the man himself plays no conscious role, but with intimate connection with and derivation from the man (see above, p. 7). What might be the significance of this ‘rib’? The commentator Matthew Henry (1662—1714) put it rather beautifully:

When God made woman He did not take her out of man’s head for her to lord it over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him; but out of his side to be equal with him, from under his arm to be protected by him, and from near his heart to be loved by him.

What ever you may think of this as a piece of exegesis, I think it is an accurate depiction of how the Bible understands man and woman to be related to each other under God.

Note the words, ‘*from under his arm to be protected by him*’. Women have a protective role towards their children, and towards others in special need; and in the marriage service a wife undertakes to ‘honour and protect her husband’, which among other things may mean she is to see that he is not put down in the presence of others. But there is a responsibility that the man has for the woman that she does not have for him in the same way. In speaking of the

honour and consideration that husbands are to have for their wives, as ‘joint heirs’ together ‘of the grace of life’, 1 Peter 3:7 speaks of the woman as ‘the weaker sex’. Not, as we have made plain above (p. 11), the *weak* sex—anything but—but the *weaker* sex, the one that needs to be more tenderly cared for.

Especially is this true in the area of spiritual warfare. Leadership in the ministry of the word, as anyone engaged in it will know, is an intense form of spiritual warfare. No one can engage in that without the proper covering or protection. Eve was engaged in spiritual warfare in the garden of Eden, confronted by that old serpent called the devil (see Genesis 3:1–6, Revelation 12:9). And where was Adam? It seems that he was there (Genesis 3:6), but he was not doing anything to protect her. Perhaps, seeing her ‘glory’ (see above p. 9), he thought that she was so beautiful and so capable that she could handle this on her own! But he was wrong. 1 Timothy 2:14 says,

the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

No doubt she is responsible for that. But it also says in the same verse,

Adam was not deceived.

Presumably this means that Adam knew exactly what he was doing when he ate the forbidden fruit, and was quite intentional about it! And when the Lord came looking for them in the garden, He did not say first of all, ‘Eve, what have you done?’ Rather He ‘called to the *man*, and said to him, “Where are *you*?”’ (Genesis 3:9). In Romans 5:12–19 it is consistently called the sin of *Adam*. He is responsible for what they both did, because he was not where he should have been, or was not doing what he should have done, when the devil tempted Eve.

Is it possible that we are now putting women at risk by placing them in these exposed leadership positions without the proper covering of protective love and care? Are we thereby placing the whole church in danger? The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or

a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

It can happen quite easily. Could it be that we are seeing it happen in our own church at this time?

## EPILOGUE

### Where to from here?

If what we have been saying here is true, then it is not enough just to accept the present situation in the Anglican Church of Australia as if it is here to stay. The intention should be to have the decision regarding the ordination of women reversed, or in some way rendered of none effect.

Improbable as this may seem, such things have happened before in the life of the church. To give one example: between 325 and 381 AD the Arian heresy, that Jesus was something more than human and less than divine (which meant he ended up being neither), held the upper hand in the church, with widespread support from the populace and the governing authorities. The faithfulness under persecution of a minority of people like Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, ensured that the intractable truth of Christ, as presented in the whole Scriptures, was reasserted.

Such an aim is best served by 'the open statement of the truth' spoken of by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2:

we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Any approach to this matter, however, needs to take seriously and sensitively the presence of women already ordained as priests in the Anglican Church of Australia.

#### **Right After All?**

It has been said that a number of people formerly opposed to the ordination of women have come to support it after experiencing the ministry of an ordained woman. We can rejoice that God is blessing these ministries. But we cannot draw any conclusions from that as to the rightness or wrongness of the ordination of women as priests or bishops. What it tells us is that God is full of loving-kindness and grace and mercy and forbearance towards all of us sinners, whether right or wrong.

Nor can we say, if we see an ordained woman having difficulties in ministry, 'There you are—I told you so!' That proves nothing. Men also have difficulty and failure in ordained ministry. Would we say then that men should not be ordained? May God have mercy on us all!

I have always said that I may be proved wrong in this matter. But the success or otherwise of women in ordained ministry will not do that.

### **How closely can we work together?**

Women already ordained I count as my friends and my colleagues in ministry. I still believe we have made a mistake. I still believe that we have not done them or the church a favour by trying to put them in that position. But I never raise it as an issue with them. Rather I seek to extend towards them a certain covering of equality and friendship that will not leave them all alone in ministry. But if they see that as somehow patronising or down-putting, I respect them in that.

This is where I may not be a very good member of the Association for Apostolic Ministry. I can conceive of situations that are not of my making where it may be pastorally more appropriate to receive some ministry from an ordained woman rather than make an issue of it on the spot. I may be inconsistent here, but I believe that love counts for much, and covers many short-comings.

Even so, there are inevitably certain barriers. Some take understandable exception to my views expressed here, and that can make relationships difficult. After 1990, when women were ordained in the Diocese, I was approached and asked whether I would be willing to have a woman deacon as an assistant curate. I said I would be happy to have a woman on the staff, if she was willing to come, but when the time came for her to be ordained priest I would not be able to rejoice with her in that as fully as she might like me to, and that may not be fair on her. As it turned out, our parish took on no further assistant curates at that time for financial reasons, so that took care of that.

If we remain members of the Anglican Church, then I think we need to say that ordained women are what the church

says they are, even if we think the church has misused or subtly changed the office of priest or bishop by ordaining them. Even so, I will not invite a woman priest to celebrate the eucharist or to preach, lest it appear that I endorse the putting of them into a position that may do them and the church no good. So these difficulties and barriers remain. The best that can be said about these difficulties is that they are one expression of the legitimate freedom that exists within a Church that counts diversity as one of its strengths.

### **Women as Bishops?**

This freedom, diversity and tolerance could be tested to breaking-point should women be consecrated as bishops. Under a woman bishop I would have no choice in the receiving or otherwise of her ministry. I would be bound to receive it. She may see it necessary to attempt to 'correct' my views in this matter. I may feel it necessary to be more explicit about my views with her than I need to be at present with my female colleagues, and she understandably may not take kindly to that. Whether anything is said or not, it would no doubt be an issue or a possible sore point between us, with consequent unhelpfulness in pastoral relationships at the personal and parish level. So unless we were to have alternative pastoral arrangements, such as the 'flying bishops' in the church of England (and these have so far been steadfastly opposed in Australia), I cannot see how the consecration of women as bishops would ultimately be helpful to the church. The Anglican Church, for all its 'comprehensiveness', has not always been good at handling non-conforming minorities. The Act of Uniformity insisted upon by the Church of England in 1662 effectively unchurched 2,000 clergy without compensation. After 1688 a further 8 bishops and 400 clergy (the 'non-jurors') were deprived of their livings for refusing to break the oath taken to their sovereign at the time of their ordination. The Church of England also found it hard to accommodate such great and worthy figures as Richard Baxter, John Wesley, and John Henry Newman, and dealt them shameful treatment. The consecration of women as bishops in the Anglican Church of Australia could prove to be another one of those sad times in our history as a church when our famed

inclusiveness gives way to intolerance and pressure to conform.

### **Meanwhile**

Meanwhile I shall continue to serve in the Anglican Church alongside the men, women and children God has placed there with me.

I shall continue to bear firm and gentle witness to the truth as it presents itself to me, however inadequately I may have grasped it, and I shall accept whatever consequences that may hold for me in the life of the church and in the community.

I shall continue to seek to extend to my wife and daughter (both of whom have strong Christian ministries, and neither of whom have any inclination to be ordained!), and to other women, that protective headship-covering of love, care and honour that helps to free and secure them in life and ministry.

And I shall never leave the Anglican Church unless I am kicked out of it!