

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

An explanation of the
Guild of Servants of the Sanctuary statement
on Women Priests
by

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When I used to have the privilege of preparing adults and children for the Sacrament of Confirmation, early in the course I always asked them to look at the Title Page of the Book of Common Prayer where they would find written- 'The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the use of The Church of England' I also used to say to children that if they could find the word 'Protestant' in the B.C.P. I would give them 10/- (50p). This amount had to be increased with the passage of time! However, I was never out of pocket!

It will now be clear to you, reader, that the Church of England is not a Protestant Church or Sect but part of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church - Catholic and Reformed, if you like. How could Archbishop Cranmer and others down the years make that claim? They could do so because even through periods of dispute and pressure from Protestants the C.of E. retained the ancient Creeds, the three fold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons (v.the .B.C.P.Title Page again), the two Gospel Sacraments given by Christ - Holy Baptism and the Eucharist as well as what are known as the lesser Sacraments. If you dig you can find auricular confession mentioned in the Visitation of the Sick. The C.of E. retained the Old and New Testaments as 'containing all things necessary to salvation'. These foundation stones are sometimes put under the heading of the Lambeth Quadrilateral (of 1888).

I have written this introduction to aid our thinking together about the divisive matter of the (alleged to my mind) 'ordination' of women to the priesthood and, possibly, in the future to the episcopate. At a meeting of Guild Officers in February, 2007, it was suggested that I might put on paper some thoughts which will be available to Guild

members when the Guild Statement about female ministers issued firstly in 1993 and again in 2006 is questioned. Quite often when this Statement is questioned observations are made such as ‘Times have moved on’; ‘Times have changed’. Occasionally, further statements are made that a female reverend is ‘very sincere’. I don't doubt it. But all these observations collapse when the question is asked - a very important one - ‘Where did the Provinces of Canterbury and of York receive the authority to change the God-given form and nature of the Ordained Ministry of the ancient Catholic Church of our land? The short answer to that question is that the Provinces didn't have the authority. You may reply that the General Synod was responsible for the change. But that reply still begs the question whence came the authority? Remember we are here thinking about the Catholic Priesthood not a Protestant Ministry. (I am not suggesting that God is not at work in the latter Ministry). So we must ask ourselves ‘Is it possible for a woman to be a priest in the Catholic Church?’ Remember before you answer that question that we are concerned with the Catholic Priesthood which has come down to us in the great Communion of East and West. It is assumed by many that because a woman has had the traditional rites of ordination to the priesthood performed upon her by a bishop she has become, thereby, a priest. This is a false assumption because the General Synod had not the authority to undo almost 2,000 years of tradition when the Measure was passed allowing women to be ‘ordained’. The present situation is divisive and will be even more so perhaps disastrously so if women are admitted to the episcopate. With the provision of Provincial Episcopal Visitors for those parishes which cannot accept female ministers, the C.of E. has just about held together. Incidentally, there is no doubt if this provision had not been made, Parliament would not have agreed to the Measure becoming Law. If women become ‘bishops’ deep divisions will come about not least in regard to whether a male priest has been ordained by a male or a female!

There are enough problems at present without adding to them. I have in mind the situation that arises when there is a female minister on the staff of a parish church and there is Reservation. Who celebrated the Eucharist when the Holy Sacrament was reserved was it a male or female? If the latter, I for one would not genuflect as I do not believe her Orders to be valid. It is as simple and as difficult as that.

To sum up.....Where are we left? If you think the General Synod of the Church of England had the authority to permit the 'ordination' of women then you are clearly happy with the present situation. However, I would claim that you are mistaken. Incidentally I am not in any way against the ministry of women but there are no reasons why a woman needs to be 'ordained' to fulfil that ministry. The Catholic Faith is not a matter of private judgement as the Bishop of Richborough rightly points out in his 'Ad Clerum 13' of Ash Wednesday 2007. He also writes 'It is quite obvious in some parishes that for many the Catholic Faith is little more than about maintaining the externals with little understanding about what we believe not least about the ordained ministry.' The future looks somewhat uncertain but we must be faithful in our calling to maintain and spread the Catholic Faith. The G.S.S. is a Catholic Society and as such must be aligned with those who are not in favour of the 'ordination' of females.

I end with the dying words of saintly Bishop Ken (1637-1711) 'I die in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic faith professed by the whole church before the disunion of East and West; more particularly I die in the communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from all papal and puritanical innovations, and as it adheres to the doctrine of the Cross.'

David Moore.... Lent 2007.