

BISHOPS, PRESBYTERS AND WOMEN

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Introduction

‘It is evident unto all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the apostles’ time there have been these orders of ministers in Christ’s church; bishops, priests and deacons.’ Thus begins the preface to the ordinal of the Church of England, which still remains one of its fundamental formularies and thus, by extension, one of the defining documents of the Anglican Communion.

When Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote those words in 1549, he was not being particularly controversial. It is true that some protestant churches in Germany and Switzerland had abandoned the historic episcopate, but this had as much to do with the peculiar nature of bishops in the Holy Roman Empire as it did with underlying ecclesiological principles. In Geneva for example, the city had been governed by its bishop, and no reformation of any kind would have been possible there unless and until he were removed. Feelings against episcopacy were largely political, and only later did they acquire theological justification. John Calvin was not against episcopacy in England, and is said to have recommended it as the best form of church government for Poland. Even John Knox (contrary to what many people think) did not do away with episcopacy completely. Scottish bishops continued to exist, albeit in a restricted role, until 1638 when episcopacy was abolished in Scotland—again, largely for political reasons. Presbyterian arguments against it were grounded in personal experience of the abuses to which that form of church government had been put, although by then there were many who argued that the Anglican type of bishop was not to be found in the New Testament church. Nobody doubted that bishops had existed in the second century, and some were prepared to concede that their office might be of apostolic origin, but whatever might be said about that, the issue in dispute was whether bishops were *prescribed* by the New Testament as a *necessary* ingredient of church government or not.

On that point, Calvin and those who followed him argued that episcopacy was not an indispensable part (the so-called *essey*) of the church, and it should be noted that the language of the preface to Cranmer's Ordinal is worded in such a way that it can be regarded as supporting that view. Cranmer's defence of the threefold order of ministry is rooted in history rather than in theology. His appeal to Scripture focusses not on any form of 'apostolic succession' but on the high moral and spiritual standards which are required of ministers at all levels. The biblical injunctions outline the character required of all ordained people, whatever special function they might be expected to perform, recognizing that the latter are directly dependent on the former. As far as the three distinct orders were concerned, Cranmer clearly believed that they could be found in Scripture, and he therefore saw no reason to modify the *status quo* in the Church of England, but he made no effort to support this belief from the Biblical text. Later generations of Anglicans, beginning with Richard Bancroft (d. 1610), found themselves embroiled in controversy with presbyterians and independents, and out of that they developed a 'divine right' theory of episcopacy, according to which the Anglican bishop as he existed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was prescribed by Scripture itself. That was the view which came to be characteristic of 'episcopalianism' (and, perhaps not surprisingly, was defended mainly by bishops!) and later became a staple of High Church and Anglo-Catholic ecclesiology, but it has remained a point of contention within the Anglican Communion, many of whose members were open to formal relationships and even reunion with non-episcopal churches, on the basis of the mutual recognition of ministries.

Modern scholarship

Cranmer's somewhat cautious appeal to history has allowed his approach to survive more recent critical study, which has generally rejected the Roman Catholic (and to some extent also Orthodox and Anglo-Catholic) theory of a direct apostolic succession of bishops. It is not without interest that the pioneer of this historical revisionism is generally recognised to have been an Anglican bishop, J.B. Lightfoot. His commentary on Philippians contains a lengthy dissertation entitled 'The Christian ministry' in which he developed his belief that there was

no essential difference in the New Testament church between the episcopate and the presbyterate.¹

So well-argued was Lightfoot's position that it has now become the standard view, embraced by almost all scholarly opinion, even in the Roman Catholic church. It is perhaps worth pointing out that Lightfoot did not regard the terms *episkopos* and *presbyteros* as entirely synonymous. He believed that the second of these had been taken over from the synagogue and was used especially to refer to the leaders of Jewish-Christian congregations, whereas *episkopos* was an equivalent term used mainly (if not exclusively) among the Gentiles. According to Lightfoot, the difference was one of flavour and reference, rather than one of substance, *i.e.*, what we would now call an early example of 'cultural contextualisation'.

Lightfoot's analysis has been developed in a number of different ways, but the Jewish-Gentile distinction has usually been regarded as fundamental. The nature of this distinction was originally defined by Friedrich Christian Baur and the so-called 'Tübingen school' of the early nineteenth century. The basic premiss of this school was that the earliest churches were communities of the free Spirit, which only later were disciplined into a rigid order which we call 'catholicism'. This evolution was supposed to have taken place over time and was not complete until the third century, although signs of it can be traced to the New Testament, notably in Luke-Acts and in the Pastoral Epistles. The result of this theory was that these books were regarded as later in date than either Matthew-Mark or the 'genuine' Pauline epistles, where the more developed church structure is apparently absent.

The Tübingen theory has undergone a number of significant modifications in the past 150 years, of which the most noticeable has been the growing belief that Jewish Christianity was legalistic (and therefore more like 'early catholicism'), whereas the first gentile churches were the domain of the free Spirit, supposedly so beloved of the 'genuine' Apostle Paul. In those churches there was apparently neither dogma nor hierarchy, and women enjoyed substantial equality with men. But as primitive freedom gave way to 'early catholicism',

dogma, hierarchy and the ‘oppression’ of women assumed their historically central places in church life.

That this reconstruction of the early church is largely a fantasy was demonstrated by English scholars like H.E.W. Turner (*The Pattern of Christian Truth*) and J.N.D. Kelly (*Early Christian Creeds; Early Christian Doctrines*). It was not accepted by Lightfoot, although his observations were enlisted in its support, and there has been a steady stream of English-speaking Biblical scholars (Sir William Ramsay, J.N.D. Kelly, J.A.T. Robinson, Donald Guthrie, F.F. Bruce, Ward Gasque) who have shown that the Tübingen claims, particularly with respect to the ‘genuine’ Paul, the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, and the historical accuracy of Luke-Acts, cannot stand up to serious examination. Nevertheless, the ideological appeal of the Tübingen approach has been such that this tradition of conservative scholarship has been ignored by the mainstream to such an extent that many writers now assume without argument that there are only seven or eight Pauline epistles which can be regarded as authentic—and one of the evidences for this ‘authenticity’ is that there is virtually no trace of dogma or hierarchy in them!

Another twist to the original Tübingen position has been the increasing tendency to give weight to gnostic and other non-canonical sources which were traditionally regarded as ‘heretical’. In fact, the very concept of ‘heresy’ has come to be understood as a late development (see Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and heresy in earliest Christianity*), which has opened the door towards accepting the evidence of gnostic and other extra-Biblical texts as valid authorities for the teaching and practice of the first Christians. This is of particular importance for the discussion about the role of women in the church, since much of the evidence cited for this comes from sources such as these. Once again, the validity of this approach has been systematically refuted by some of the scholars named above (notably by Turner and Kelly), but they have been largely ignored by the dominant consensus.

Presbyters and bishops

It is important that we understand this, since otherwise the modern

discussion makes no sense. To return to Lightfoot's analysis of the similarities and distinctions between *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi*, it has sometimes been argued that the *presbyteroi* represented the legalistic inheritance of Jewish Christianity whereas the *episkopoi* moved in the 'Pauline' freedom of the Spirit. Others have claimed that the *episkopoi* were originally house church leaders who developed into more authoritative figures, and eventually merged with the *presbyteroi*, as part of the 'catholic' takeover. Recently, Alastair Campbell, a Baptist minister, has claimed that the Pastoral Epistles were written shortly after the Apostle Paul's death to justify the newly emerging office of the monarchical *episkopos*, who claimed authority over the many *presbyteroi* in any given local church.² Campbell's argument is based mainly on the fact that the word *presbyteroi* appears in the plural, whereas the word *episkopos* is always singular, even though the contexts in which the terms are used would suggest that *episkopos* is just a generic term meaning 'the typical, or standard *presbyteros*' and not the designation of a distinct (let alone a newly-emerging) ecclesiastical order (a possibility which Campbell recognises but rejects).

The difficulty with all these theories is that words like *episkopos*, *presbyteros* and even *apostolos* (not to mention *diakonos*) have a range of meanings in the New Testament whose general drift is clear enough but which cannot be tied down to formal designations of particular offices. If we are to have any hope of understanding ministry in the New Testament churches, what we have to look for is pattern of leadership, expressed in but not exclusively defined by the individual words used to describe it.³ What we need to ask is whether there is any sign that the early church congregations had individual leaders who presided over a college of ministers, whatever name(s) may have been used to describe them?

The question is complicated because we also have to take account of the apostles, who acted in concert with each other, but who also exercised individual leadership over the congregations which they founded or which had been entrusted to them. In the case of Rome, it appears that Paul was able to exercise the function of oversight even though he had neither founded the church nor ever visited it! But the

ministry of the apostles was unique and did not extend to a second generation. During their lifetimes, and in their writings, we must expect to find some ‘underdevelopment’ in the organisation of local churches, since leadership in them was of secondary importance as long as there were roving authorities who could be appealed to in cases of dispute. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Pauline churches, but similar things can also be found elsewhere, as for example, in the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Revelation 2–3. What really matters is why things developed the way they did after the apostles died. Granted that a monarchical episcopate was well-established (at least in the core churches of the eastern Mediterranean) by the time of Ignatius of Antioch (*c.* 107–117), was this something which the apostles themselves had desired and initiated, or did it come about without their express approval and possibly even against what they would have wished?

It is generally agreed that the Pastoral Epistles present Timothy and Titus in a role analogous to that of the later bishop, although there are certain differences and there is some doubt as to whether their assignments were temporary or permanent.⁴ Did Titus merely visit Crete to put things in order, or did he go there to reside permanently as the overseer of the Cretan congregations? And of course, we cannot escape the question of the authorship of the Pastorals, since the denial of their claims to Pauline origin entails a denial of the apostolic origin of Timothy’s and Titus’ episcopal ministry. It has to be said that this is often a circular argument, since much of the impetus for assigning the Pastorals to a post-apostolic date comes from the perception that the ecclesiology which they describe is substantially more ‘developed’ in the direction of ‘early catholicism’ than that which is found in the so-called ‘authentic’ Pauline epistles. There is every reason to agree with those who say that the Pastorals represent a kind of halfway house between the first apostolic missions and the more settled episcopacy of later times, but if the pastorals were written by Paul, this transition was initiated by the apostles themselves as a means of preserving something of their ministry in the later church. There can then be no grounds for denying its authenticity, and consequently its authoritative place in the life of the church ever since. Part of the argument against this, of

course, is that Paul made considerable use of women in his mission, and therefore they must have occupied leadership roles in the church. As things tightened up and became more structured ('after Paul's death' goes without saying) the role of women declined accordingly and soon vanished altogether.⁵ Modern defenders of a 'gender-inclusive' ministry therefore have a vested interest in seeing the Pastoral Epistles as a deviation from the apostolic norm, even if that deviation was generally acquiesced in at the time.⁶

This is a very tempting line of thought for those who advocate the unrestricted admission of women to all three orders of the modern ministry, but it is based on assumptions which cannot be substantiated from the texts. It is true that women feature prominently in the Pauline epistles, but nowhere is there any evidence that they were *episkopoi*. No woman is ever called either an *episkopos* or a *presbyteros* (only a *diakonos*), and the one instance where a woman may have been called an *apostolos*, apart from being unclear, merely raises the question of what forms of ministry the word *apostolos* might have included in that context.⁷ Probably the true answer is that women in the early church enjoyed the same freedoms and opportunities as they did in contemporary Graeco-Roman (and especially in Jewish) society. As long as the church was based in private homes, it is not surprising to find women mentioned so prominently, since the home was their domain. But none of that means that women were given positions of authority alongside men - and certainly not above them. Such a move would have been revolutionary in the ancient world, and if it had occurred in the first Christian congregations, there would surely have been some mention of it.⁸ On the other side, it is quite clear that women were not included in the presbyterate known to Timothy and Titus, where the qualifications of an elder refer exclusively to males.

Evidence from the immediate post-apostolic period is relatively scarce, but what there is only supports the view that the situation recorded in the Pastoral Epistles must have been in existence well within the lifetime of at least some of the apostles. Clement of Rome, for example, wrote to the Corinthian church about A.D. 96 (when the Apostle John may still have been living):

Preaching through countries and cities, the apostles appointed the first-fruits of their labours to be bishops and deacons of those who would believe afterwards. However, they first tested them by the Spirit.⁹

If Clement had been wrong about this, there would certainly have been many people in Corinth who could have put him right, and he would have known that. He then goes on to add:

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of oversight. For this reason therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those already mentioned. Afterwards, they gave instructions that when those men should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion therefore, that those appointed by the apostles, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry.¹⁰

This passage is extremely revealing, because it shows us how the bishops were appointed. Names would be put forward by the existing elders of the church, and then the approval of the whole congregation would be sought. Once that was obtained, the newly appointed bishop would have tenure of office as long as his life matched the exacting criteria set out in Titus 2. Nevertheless, it is also clear that not everyone in the church was prepared to accept this arrangement, and that there was pressure from at least parts of the church to dismiss bishops—though for what reason(s) we are not told. Perhaps it was simply a matter of factionalism, or party politics, in which different groups felt that it was ‘time for a change’ and that everyone should have a turn!¹¹ There is certainly no suggestion either of immoral conduct or of heresy—quite the reverse.

Writing somewhat later, Ignatius of Antioch (*c.* 107-117) is the first person to make the now classical distinction between a (singular) bishop and plural presbyters, whom he compares to Christ and his apostles.¹² The bishop is the president of the governing council of the church, but the presbyters share in his ministry and must be obeyed equally with him.¹³ It is however quite clear what the limits of the bishop's 'authority' are. He cannot command the church in the way that the apostles could (and did)¹⁴ and it is apparent that he acts primarily as a focus of unity for the church as a whole, which is symbolised above all in the eucharist at which he ought normally to preside.¹⁵ Ignatius accepts that the bishop may delegate his presidential functions to another, and we can only assume that this must have been to one or more of the presbyters. In the modern church such 'delegation' has long been the norm, so much so that it has largely been forgotten that presbyterial presidency at the eucharist is a delegated privilege, not a right which has been conferred by ordination.¹⁶

One reason for this confusion of course, is that the Ignatian bishop was much more like a modern incumbent than like a modern bishop, because in most cases he would not have had a flock larger than that of the average parish today. Everything Ignatius says presumes a congregational framework rather than a diocesan one, in which bishop and presbyters exercised a team ministry to which every member of the church would have been directly connected. It can therefore be argued that a presbyter today functions more or less as an Ignatian bishop did in the second century, and so if women can be admitted to the modern presbyterate there is little reason to deny them the episcopate, even if it is a distinct order in the church.

The headship question

But however true this may be, it is still the case that the Ignatian bishop was expected to act as the focus of unity for the church in a way which was (and is) not expected of the presbyters. The scale on which this function operates has certainly changed over the centuries, but the underlying principle has not. The modern Anglican bishop still acts as a diocesan co-ordinator, without whose licence no presbyter or deacon

can legitimately function. He is the ‘head’ of the diocese, to whom people turn for authoritative guidance on a wide range of policies and initiatives. To admit that not all bishops have fulfilled their function(s) in the most edifying manner is not to deny that this is a real and valuable ministry, and one which has helped to permit the wide range of diversity which the Church of England exhibits at parish level. For better or for worse, the Anglican Communion has shown an ability to keep mutually antagonistic groups under one organisational umbrella to a degree unknown elsewhere, and there can be no doubt that the Anglican form of episcopacy has contributed to this to a significant degree, even if it is not the only factor involved.

‘Headship’ is a controversial subject and in recent years the use of the Greek word *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11 has been the object of much scholarly debate. The most recent and in some ways thorough treatment of the question is by Professor A.C. Thiselton, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians.¹⁷ Professor Thiselton surveys the evidence and demonstrates that the word *kephale* (basically ‘head’) has a wide range of metaphorical meanings according to context, but that in the end all of these revolve around the notion of ‘pre-eminence’. There is an order in the spiritual universe which can be expressed in terms of ‘headship’ as follows: God the Father is the head of the Son, the Son is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. This order was symbolised in public worship by the fact that women covered their heads and men did not. The appropriateness of this symbolism can be questioned in a culture where hat-wearing is uncommon, but the underlying principle cannot. The order which it represents belongs to creation, though Professor Thiselton is anxious to point out that it does not mean that women are inferior to men.

If we look carefully at the ‘hierarchy’ presented by the Apostle Paul, we realise that ontologically speaking, Father and Son are equal in the Godhead, whereas male and female are equal in their common humanity. It is between the divine and the human that the great gulf of inequality is fixed, and so whatever the hierarchy of headship is supposed to stand for, it cannot be that. When we stop to think about it, the surprising thing about Paul’s statement is that human beings are

classed in the same structure of order as members of the Godhead, and this provides an important clue as to the meaning of the passage. Men and women are linked to God the Father and the Son because as human beings they are created in the image and likeness of God. Headship therefore refers to a pattern of relationships within a divine order which transcends the distinction between created and uncreated being. The Son is not subordinate to the Father because the Father is somehow his 'source' (Professor Thiselton points out, in line with most serious scholarship, that the word *kephale* does not mean 'source'), but because that is his place in a divine order in which the individuality of each of the persons is affirmed and protected. Father and Son need each other in order to be themselves, and this mutuality is worked out in the submissiveness of the Son just as much as it is in the 'authority' of the Father who raises him from the dead and thereby validates his sacrifice. Similarly, male and female need each other in order to be themselves, and their interrelationship is also expressed in terms of submission and sacrifice. The link between the divine and the human is provided by the incarnate Son, who is at once both priest and victim, judge and sacrifice. The whole pattern of our salvation is worked out in this complex structure of 'order', which the church is called to proclaim and reflect in its public worship.

It is this aspect of the matter which makes it inappropriate for a woman to occupy a position in the church which by definition makes men subordinate to her. Neither her ability to do the job, nor her fundamental equality with men is at stake here. If we consider the Godhead for a moment, there is nothing in the person of the Father which makes it impossible for him to become incarnate and to offer his life for the salvation of sinners; in terms of ability and equality, he was just as capable of doing this as was the Son. That however, is not the point. The Son's sacrifice is not the result of greater (or lesser) ability, but comes from the nature of their mutual relationship. Likewise, the 'headship' of the male with respect to the female is not a question of superiority or inferiority, but of relationship—and of relationship moreover in the image and likeness of God. For many Christians this raises acute difficulties with the ordination of women to the presbyterate, which seems to them to be incompatible with Biblical

teaching on headship relationships. This difficulty can perhaps be overcome with regard to the presbyterate, but only if the presbyterate is dissociated from the notion of headship. If the head of the presbyter is the bishop, it can always be argued that female presbyters can be accepted because they are not ‘heads’—they are subordinate to the headship of the bishop.¹⁸

Unity and acceptability

Whether the current pattern of Anglican episcopacy is theologically justifiable is a complex question, which perhaps ought to be addressed more seriously than it has been before any changes to it are adopted. But as long as we have the system which we have inherited, it is obvious that the bishop functions within it as a focus of unity for the ‘local’ (*i.e.*, diocesan) church, of which he is the recognised head. One aspect of this form of leadership, often neglected by modern commentators, is that the Clementine *episkopos* had to be acceptable to the entire congregation. Clement did not mean by this that absolutely everyone had to be content; he certainly had no intention of pandering to cranks or troublemakers, whom he clearly censured. But the elders of the church were expected to choose bishops who could command the general assent and respect of the congregation. In a church which permits two ‘integrities’ over the matter of women’s ordination, it must be obvious that in applying this principle today, bishops must command the respect of both if the unity of the church is to be preserved.

Those who favour women bishops are not opposed to having men, but those who do not will not accept women, which means that if the two integrities are to be held together, only men can be appointed as bishops. To appoint a woman would be to split the church by denying the legitimacy of one of the integrities. The principle that this should be avoided has a precedent in the New Testament, in the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3). This was imposed on him by the Apostle Paul, in spite of the latter’s well-known and frequently articulated opposition to circumcision as a theological necessity, in order to make Timothy more acceptable to Jewish Christians, who were the other integrity of their day. Timothy had to be acceptable without question by everyone,

which was enough to mandate a practice which the apostle would never have justified on theological grounds.

It is perhaps worth remembering here that the principle of universal acceptability for the heads of churches has an importance which goes beyond the question of women's ministry alone. In Wales, for example, it has been debated whether a bishop ought to know the Welsh language if he is expected to represent the whole church, and in England the question of citizenship might arise if a foreigner were to be nominated as a bishop. There are obviously many monoglot English-speakers in the Welsh ministry who would make excellent bishops, just as there are many eminent foreigners who would grace the episcopate if they were to be elected to it. The issue in such cases is not one of ability, but of suitability, and here non-theological factors have a legitimate role to play, as the case of Timothy's circumcision demonstrates.¹⁹

Conclusion

The current debate over the suitability of women bishops is one which finds equally sincere people holding opposing and incompatible views. The minority traditionalist 'integrity' knows that it has little chance of persuading the majority,²⁰ but continues to hope that time will show that it has been right to maintain its stand. Its position is rooted in an understanding of Scripture and tradition which is not eccentric or cantankerous, and may yet succeed in winning over the majority to its views. Certainly there is little sign of its dying out in the course of time, or of its becoming restricted to one group or type of churchmanship. Traditionalism on this issue is widely spread across the church, and is present among women as well as men. If it is wrong, as those who favour the consecration of women as bishops clearly think it is, it should be allowed to die of its own accord (as Jewish Christianity did) and not be expelled from the church by a majoritarian imposition of a form of leadership which the minority cannot accept. This willingness to wait for a consensus to emerge is known in theological parlance as 'the process of reception'. As long as there are two integrities officially recognised in the Church of England, the process of receiving women's ordination must be regarded as incomplete, and in those

circumstances, the consecration of women bishops can do nothing but divide the church still further. The way forward is unclear, but supporters of women bishops should at least understand that unless and until they can persuade the other integrity of the rightness of their own position, the way of charity dictates a willingness to forgo it for the sake of peace in the church as a whole.

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- 1 J.B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's epistle to the Philippians* (4th edn., London, 1878), pp. 181-269. The first edition, which also contained the dissertation, appeared in 1868.
- 2 R.A.Campbell, *The elders: seniority within earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 176-204.
- 3 The different uses of the word *apostolos* are an obvious case in point, but there has been a noticeable tendency in recent years to ignore these in an effort to prove that there were female 'apostles' on essentially the same level as the Twelve.
- 4 The most important difference is that Timothy and Titus were given roving commissions by the Apostle Paul, whereas later bishops were heads of particular local churches elected by their members.
- 5 This is the line taken by R.A. Campbell, *Elders*, pp. 255-7. In his reconstruction, the progressive emergence of the monarchical episcopate was directly paralleled by the progressive exclusion of women from positions of authority.
- 6 It is perhaps worth pointing out that there is no evidence that this post-apostolic trend, if that is what it was, was seriously resisted by anyone, unless of course gnostic movements and the like are taken as evidence of that.
- 7 Romans 16:7. Whatever else may be said about this, it is quite clear that 'Junia' was not one of the twelve apostles. It is also probable that whatever she was or did was in tandem with Andronicus, whom we must presume was her husband.
- 8 It might have been resisted, as was the admission of uncircumcised males to church membership, but it might also have been boasted of as a sign of Christian freedom. Neither reaction is attested anywhere.
- 9 Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 11 Something like this occurs in the Church of England, when it is assumed that an Evangelical should follow an Anglo-Catholic to Canterbury, etc.

- 12 Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, 6.
- 13 *Idem*, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 2.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 2; *idem*, *Epistle to the Romans*, 4.
- 15 *Idem*, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 8-9.
- 16 This whole discussion has been bedevilled by a false conception of ‘sacerdotal priesthood’, according to which the ordained presbyter received a sacramental grace which made him ontologically different from (and implicitly superior to) the average church member. How much of the pressure for female ordination has been driven by a sense that women have been unjustly excluded from this ‘grace’ is impossible to determine, but it has undoubtedly played a role by exacerbating the whole problem of ‘status’ within the body of Christ on an essentially false premiss.
- 17 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- 18 It is true, of course, that very few opponents of female bishops would argue this way. Most of them are just as opposed to the ordination of women as presbyters because (among other things) a presbyter functions as the ‘head’ of a local congregation.
- 19 Of course, opponents of the ordination of women often believe that a theological principle is at stake, but the point here is that even those who reject that argument ought to consider the validity of remaining within the bounds of universal acceptability.
- 20 The terms ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ are somewhat subjective and are used here for convenience. It is always possible that today’s apparent majority, which is of very recent origin, may not last.