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## **DOES SCRIPTURE SUPPORT WOMEN BISHOPS?**

Jonathan Frais

*The following points were made in presentations to Horsham Deanery Synod and Eastborne Deanery Synod in February. Jonathan was previously a member of General Synod for the Diocese of Europe, whilst being Chaplain in Kiev and is now Rector of St. Mark Bexhill. Jonathan gives a number of arguments for women bishops and then responds to them.*

### **1 Patriarchy came with the Fall (Genesis 3).**

But the pointers are otherwise. In Genesis 2, man was made first, woman was made from man, man was given the word of God before woman was made, man called her “woman” (naming being an exercise of authority), and God calls her “helper” (a term given great dignity by being used of God himself (Psalm 27:9) and being a foretaste of the gospel in which Jesus “helps” us by dying for us on the cross). So there was male leadership in the Garden of Eden. With this comes greater accountability: so when the women sinned first, God questions the man first.

### **2 Jesus worked within the social restraints of his time.**

But he challenged customs that he disliked (for example, in John 4, in behaviour frowned upon by other Jews, he talks to a Samaritan woman). The Lord did not ignore women, insult them, or talk down to them, but neither did he appoint them apostles.

### **3 Paul’s teaching was a temporary cultural restraint.**

But he claims otherwise. The reason why women are not to be the leading teachers in the congregation is because “Adam was formed first” (1 Timothy 2:13). We are different by design. In Jesus there is neither “male nor female” (Galatians 3:28) but God calls men to lead. In any case, the Roman world was like ours (obsessed with democracy, trade, warfare, science, art, theatre and sport) so cultural differences are overplayed.

### **4 Women shared leadership in the New Testament (and early church).**

There are female prophets (1 Corinthians 12:5), a deaconess (Romans 16:1), and Priscilla worked with Paul (Romans 16:3) and co-hosted a church (1 Corinthians 16:19) but female leadership was not accepted by the mainstream church.

### **5 The Holy Spirit can change tradition for the cause of mission.**

He is the Spirit of truth and refreshes us in the unchanging teaching that meets our unchanging moral and spiritual needs. Nevertheless, everything we do can be reviewed in the light of Scripture.

### **6 If we exclude women then we are calling them inferior.**

Yet Jesus submitted to his heavenly Father but he was not a lesser God. So God the Trinity is our model for submission-within-equality. Therefore one person can submit to another (for instance, a child to a parent or citizens to the state) without any implication of inferiority.

### **7 This is a matter of justice.**

It would be better to call it a matter of faithfulness – justice is a slippery term and we should be wary of defining it in ways that strain Scripture. What cannot be proved by the Bible should not be accepted (Article VI).

### **8 We need to be credible in the eyes of the world.**

Actually, we are called to be holy and this is often incredible in the eyes of the world.

**9 The need to use all our gifts in the cause of mission requires this change.**

But the ends do not justify the means and God is as much concerned with our methods as our goals.

**10 The needs for a bishop can be met by either sex.**

God the Father requires that the church of God the Son knows that grace renews nature and does not violate it. Leadership is male throughout the Bible.

**11 We really decided this matter in 1992** when General Synod voted to ordain women as priests (presbyters).

Not so. The possibility of women bishops, which would force those who uphold male leadership into a greater corner, was left to a later date. That is why we are discussing it now.

**12 Those who resist this change would also have kept slavery.**

How so? The slave trade is condemned as sinful (1 Timothy 1:10) and Paul shows how Christian owners should free their slaves (Philemon). So abolishing the slave trade brings us into line with the Bible whereas consecrating women bishops takes us away from it.