

To members of the General Synod

June 2010

We write to you as the Council of Church Society in advance of your further consideration of the **legislation to consecrate women as Bishops**.

We believe that God's will, revealed in Scripture, is that leadership in the Church should be exercised by men. In the practice of the Church of England, as it has developed, this means that presbyters (priests) and bishops should be male. We therefore reiterate our opposition to the proposed legislation.

Nevertheless we recognise that the majority may wish to go ahead and present possible legislation to the Dioceses. Our particular concern at this point is therefore that if this legislation were passed as it stands it would create deeper and lasting division. We are conscious of friends, clergy and laity, who were passionately committed to the Church of England, but felt in conscience that they could no longer remain within its bounds after the vote in 1992 to ordain women as presbyters. We do not doubt that others will follow if this legislation goes ahead without amendment.

The legislation agreed in 1992-4 made provision for those who could not in conscience accept the decision and thus allowed many to remain, though some left. We have long argued that there should have been an evangelical PEV appointed and believe that the consistent failure to do this has greatly increased the alienation of conservative evangelicals. We see further and continuing evidence of able and gifted young men who no longer see the Church of England as welcoming their ministry and who are therefore establishing new ministries outside our church structures or joining other established denominations. We believe our church is ill able to lose such leaders of the future.

This issue is a matter of fundamental principle to us. We believe it concerns our faithfulness to the revealed will of God. The proposals currently before General Synod will undo the legal provisions in relation to the earlier Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure. We have no confidence in a code of practice because there is ample evidence in relation to other legislation that such codes are ineffective and are often ignored or distorted with no effective means of recourse or appeal. The Church of England has long believed that legislation is necessary to regulate its affairs, in large part because of the simple and obvious fact that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

You will, we trust, have seen a letter from incumbents organised by Reform. We endorse that letter and the concerns expressed in it. We also draw your attention to the final point they make that commitments were made in 1992-4 for proper lasting provision, and the General Synod now seems about to break those promises.

Therefore, we urge you to vote in July in favour of amendments that will ensure that proper provision is made which is acceptable to those who desire it, that preserves the promises made 18 years ago, and which is protected from abuse by being embodied in legislation.

Yours faithfully,
The Council of Church Society