

Women Bishops: A Response to Cardinal Kasper

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Introduction

We greatly valued the chance to hear Cardinal Kasper at the House of Bishops meeting, and were enormously grateful that he made the time to accept the Archbishop of Canterbury's invitation to come and address the Bishops' Meeting, to which a number of senior women in the Church of England had also been invited. Cardinal Kasper wrote and delivered a paper especially for the occasion, and was ready to engage in discussion with us. He came in a spirit of intellectual and theological rigour and engaged with us robustly and frankly, speaking with the clarity that goes with deep friendship. Cardinal Kasper embodies in himself and in his work the openness and warm spirit of much current ecumenical dialogue, and as we thank God for him, we offer these reflections in the same spirit of frankness, friendship and, we hope, rigour.

A *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Rome's View of Canterbury*

1. The fact that Cardinal came in person at short notice speaks volumes for the depth of Rome's commitment to our shared ecumenical endeavours. As *The Tablet* leader put it, 'the fact that he agreed to address a crucial meeting of the Church of England bishops shows how close he sees the relationship and how close it is seen by the Archbishop of Canterbury . . . Thus far has ecumenism travelled.' However, we were sorry that these implicit volumes did not translate in this address into spoken commitment to the Cardinal's own project, advanced elsewhere, of 'Receptive Ecumenism' – the project whereby Rome asks, 'what do other churches possess which we in Rome do not possess and which we therefore need to receive?' That question, and the humility of the implied stance it presupposes, is full of hopeful possibilities; some in Rome itself would see precisely developments in the ministry and episcopacy as cases in point of developments elsewhere which Rome might want to adopt. But neither the theoretical point nor that particular application appeared in the Cardinal's address. In relation to this, we would have liked to press him further on the question of the development of doctrine, recalling the words of *Dei Verbum* II.8 "There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down [from the apostles]. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Luke 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her". What are the criteria by which some developments (some growths in understanding, as it were) are seen as legitimate – the adoption of compulsory celibacy, a distinctively monastic discipline, for all ordained priests or the Marian Dogmas of 1854 and 1952, for example – while of others, like the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate, Cardinal Kasper declares that 'the Catholic Church is convinced that she has no right to [revise its current position]'?
2. Second, we note a fundamental difference in the way in which we address theological questions. Cardinal Kasper's paper begins by quoting the correspondence between the Popes and successive Archbishops of Canterbury, the detailed response to the Rochester Report, and draws our attention to the various Papal pronouncements on this matter before he moves to consider the biblical and patristic material. He is, understandably, concerned to defend the tradition of the Church rather than to explore what the possibilities for development might be, let alone whether the Church's traditional position of how the *imago Christi* is represented might be considered defective. So the themes he develops around the unanimity of the early church (quoting Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24 et al)

and the nature of *koinonia*/communion presume a more monolithic picture of the church and of the ministry of the bishop in the service of that unity than our reading both of the events of Pentecost and of, for example, Paul's letters to the Corinthians might warrant. Unity in the life of the early church was marked by a great diversity of expression, and the events of Pentecost witness to a unity in the Spirit that was far from unanimous in expression. It was precisely because of this considerable diversity that writers like Cyprian, whom he quotes extensively, developed a theology which would secure not unity in diversity so much as uniformity.

3. We note that the Cardinal labels types of ecclesiology in quite precise 'catholic' and 'protestant' categories. He is of course well aware that the Anglican church claims to be both catholic and reformed in a way that goes beyond the sterility of at least some post-16th century debate in those terms. But the final sections of his paper continue to present a greater polarization between his type of 'catholic' theology and that of 'the Protestant churches of the 16th century' in a way which appeared to leave no room for that type of catholic ecclesiology which the Anglican Communion has lived and developed over the last four centuries.
4. The Cardinal is likewise aware that *Apostolicae Curae*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical of 1896 which pronounces Anglican orders to be 'absolutely null and utterly void' has not been rescinded in the 110 years since its promulgation, nor has any reply been received to the response of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York of 1897, *Saepius Officio*, and this despite Vatican II's far less absolute statement that certain churches had not preserved the "*full and integral* mystery of the Eucharist". But he hints that the road has been open to ways by which some recognition of Anglican orders might have been forthcoming – and said that to consecrate women as bishops would represent a substantial block to that option. In practice there is a 'special place' in the heart of Rome for the Anglican tradition, and for the person of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which the official formularies do not recognise.

This introduces a difficulty for us: which of these signals is genuine? There is no recognition of Anglican orders, no possibility of intercommunion, except when Anglicans are deprived of the sacraments of their own church, and little recognition of the difficulties that continues to be experienced by the children of a mixed Anglican-Roman marriage. At the same time, Rome, being concerned for the sake of the unity that God wills, is anxious to advise us on what we may and may not do with our orders, which are not regarded as valid anyway. We note that *Dominus Iesus* (2000), continued to regard Anglican churches as separated quasi-ecclesial communities. Rome regards the Eastern Orthodox as a 'church' on the grounds, in that document, that they 'objectively intend reunion' with Rome. Their *intention* is the ground of Rome's recognition – not their historic episcopate – but that same intention is to be found in the dialogue statements of Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists. And *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) continues to regard unity as union, however gently expressed, with the Bishop of Rome.

5. There are many in the Anglican world who would go further than ask this question. Faced with Rome's charge that Anglican innovations might make a projected unity more difficult, even those in the Vatican most concerned with patrolling the boundaries must recognise that to many Anglicans it seems that this charge could be levelled the other way round. The dogmas relating to the papacy (1870) and to Mary (1950) remain real obstacles for many who find it difficult to recognise them as developments in any sense from scripture and the tenets of the early church, and the recent work of ARCIC has not managed to find a pathway to help the churches travel together in these areas. The '*filioque*' clause in the Creed is to this day regarded by Eastern Orthodox Christians as an unwarranted Roman addition to the creed of the universal church. Anglicans will naturally ask by what criteria Rome claims the right to introduce potentially divisive innovations in some areas, while advising Anglicans against developing the practice, rather than altering the doctrine of the church, in others. In what sense would ordaining women to the episcopate alter the doctrine of the church? We note in this context that when Cardinal Kasper refers to

Cyprian on the unity of the bishops he fails to point out that Cyprian was writing explicitly about the collegial unity of all bishops over against the possibility that the Bishop of Rome might tell the others what to do.

6. One of the most important points at which Cardinal Kasper seems to us to misrepresent the Anglican situation comes at the point where he indicates that he and others look to the Church of England as holding a place of decisive significance within Anglicanism, so that despite the fact that there are already women bishops in some Provinces of the Anglican Communion the decision of the Church of England would somehow be key or crucial. That may be an accurate indication of how we are perceived, but the Church of England does not occupy the place in the Communion that the Vatican does in our sister church. Indeed, that imperial model – *Ecclesia Anglicana* telling the colonies how to behave – is precisely what we have done our best to avoid for several generations. As set out in the Windsor Report, we have a *modus operandi* according to which a potentially contentious issue can come to the Lambeth Conference, to the Anglican Consultative Council, and to the Primates' Meeting. To put it simply, if the Lambeth Conference gives a green light to a proposal, it is then up to an individual province to decide whether to adopt any new development for itself. We must not for a moment collude with the impression that the Church of England occupies a position analogous to the Vatican and that the Lambeth Conference is merely an expensive piece of window-dressing. This tells heavily against the argument, sometimes advanced from within Anglicanism itself, that the decision we now face in the Church of England is the real defining moment. The Lambeth Conference has already given the green light to ordaining women to the episcopate; all we are being asked now is whether we, in our Province, want to adopt for ourselves something to which worldwide Anglicanism has already given approval, and which can therefore not be seen within our own inter-provincial polity as communion-breaking.
7. The question of Cardinal Kasper bringing a distinctively Roman perspective to Anglican affairs is also revealed in his remarks about unity, and about the role of the ordained ministry, and particularly of bishops, in engendering communion within that. The Anglican tradition takes its role as a 'bridge' seriously, and we too believe that we must work for, discern and enhance that unity for which Jesus prayed. But we do not believe that eucharistic unity ('communion' in that sense) is only attainable when there is full recognition of ministries, and all are in communion with the see of Rome. In Anglican theology, unity is achieved by our saying yes to God's gracious invitation to his table. It is because we are one with God through being caught up in Christ's one perfect self-offering to the Father that we have unity with one another, rather than communion with God being a consequence of our union with one another. We, in other words, are inclined to see eucharistic sharing not as the goal at the end of the ecumenical pilgrimage where God is waiting for us, but as the path of that pilgrimage itself, along which he accompanies us on the way. We would base our theology of union within the Godhead on a dynamic incorporation into the divine life of the Holy Trinity, rather more than on a sacramental theology based on the validity of the sacrament conferred by one who has the authority to do so; and we would prefer to see debates about orders within the frame of mutual eucharistic hospitality, rather than the other way around. In this regard, we would look to Galatians 2, with its clear teaching that all who believe in Jesus Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their cultural background.
8. There also needs to be further discussion on the nature of Catholicity. What was distinctive of the Church of the New Testament and the early centuries was that, unlike many other religious movements of the time, it was not based on race or profession. It broke through social but also natural divisions such as age and gender. It did this above all in its foundational, Eucharistic life, as we learn from I Corinthians 11, and from that basis its total life was formed. The Church today in its local existence must continue to embrace people of a wide variety of different types and kinds, including people with diverse opinions. This is, indeed, what is constitutive of the Church's Catholicity, as has amply been demonstrated by the Greek Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulasⁱ, who writes "the eucharistic community was in its composition a catholic community in the sense that

it transcended not only social but also natural divisions, just as it will happen in the Kingdom of God of which this community was a revelation and a real sign". The Augustinian understanding of Catholicity as universal overtook the more ancient Pauline and Ignatian understanding of Catholicity as inclusive. Wholeness is of the very essence of Church and without it the Church is not what she is called to be.

9. In discussing the source of the Church's authority, the Cardinal comes close at times to saying that it is only through the lens of the Church's tradition that scripture can be read. That has never been the Anglican position on the balance between scripture and tradition. Our formulation, carefully balanced, is that the faith we profess is a faith 'uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures, set forth in the Catholic creeds, and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness.' Our formularies continue with this historically based mission imperative: 'the Church...led by the Holy Spirit...has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, ...and is called upon to proclaim [this faith] afresh in each generation.' This commitment to proclaim the faith afresh is a challenge to pursue those developments in the Church's life which are consonant with scripture and are found to be life-giving. In the end, the arbiter is the *sensus fidei*, the entire body of the faithful, as was pointed out to Pius IX in 1848 by the Eastern Patriarchs in their Encyclical: "the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves". The faithful are the ultimate guardians of Tradition and the faith.
10. Thus, while the Cardinal declares that the Roman Catholic Church is convinced that she has no authority for ordaining women, the Anglican church would characteristically say that if this undoubted innovation can be shown to follow from, or be contained in, scripture, then that is sufficient authority whether or not the subsequent tradition of the church has allowed it. This is not to be cavalier with tradition, to which we give a very high regard; merely to insist that (since, as Aquinas himself insisted, 'tradition' is the deposit of what the church has said as it has read scripture) it must always take second place to scripture – the whole of the scriptural revelation and not just a selection of 'proof texts' – itself. This is the method which Anglicans have classically embraced, and which we attempt to follow as a fundamental theological method.

In short, while we respect the Cardinal's substantial analysis of where we are from a Roman perspective, and remain deeply grateful for the seriousness with which he takes his friendship with us, we wish to respond to that friendship in exactly the same way, by speaking frankly of the fact that his perception of how Anglicans might do theology is precisely a Roman perception, and that we perceive our theological method, and much that flows from it in an authentically and characteristically Anglican way which needs to be taken seriously as what it is, rather than treated as if it were a muddled way of doing Roman-style theology.

B Women Bishops: Biblical Exegesis and Theological Anthropology

1. Cardinal Kasper's reference to Junia in Romans 16.7 itself seemed to allow that there might after all be a possibility of re-opening the question; if, he seemed to imply, it could be demonstrated that Junia really was a woman (not 'Junias', a supposedly masculine name, as most translations have had it), then even Roman tradition might be forced to recognise the possibility that women could be apostles, and therefore presumably could hold ordained ministry in the apostolic succession. In fact, despite what the Cardinal suggested at that point in his paper, recent scholarship, drawing on excellent philology and study of ancient names, strongly suggests that the person in question was female. Junia is a well-known female name of the period, but the suggested male name Junias is not otherwise known; and, when Greek scribes began to introduce accents into their texts, they accented the name in such a way as to make it clear that it was female. That,

despite what the Cardinal said, is how it appears in the most recent edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament; and the newest edition of Metzger's commentary on textual variants indicates that those who still preferred the masculine accentuation did so simply on the grounds that they doubted whether a woman would be referred to as an 'apostle' – which precisely begs the methodological question.

2. This small but significant point opens the way for a consideration of the larger exegetical and theological issues which will come before Synod in July. First, and most important, we must give great weight to the fact that all four evangelists, but especially John, place the testimony of the women, and especially Mary Magdalene, in prime position in their accounts of Easter. It is to these women, and particularly to Mary, that the risen Lord entrusts the good news, not to the male apostles themselves. It cannot be overemphasized that this was hugely counterintuitive in the ancient world. Had the narratives been invented later, this would never have commended the account; had the evangelists had any doubt that women were to be regarded as primary witnesses of the resurrection, they would never have allowed such a story to remain in their texts. Yet there it is, in each gospel. If, with Paul, we regard 'apostleship' as primarily constituted by witness to the resurrection, Mary Magdalene is the 'apostle to the apostles', as indeed some Roman theologians have styled her.
3. This addresses the highly significant question of anthropology, rightly raised by various parties in the debate. The evangelists, again particularly but not exclusively John, present the resurrection of Jesus not as an isolated 'miracle' but as the beginning of God's new creation, God's renewal of the whole world. Within that, the roles of men and women are re-evaluated, not (to be sure) to make them identical or interchangeable in any and all respects, but to celebrate their complementarity, not least their complementary apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection. The same point is visible in Acts, where it is remarkable how women are singled out both as co-equal recipients of the outpoured Spirit and also as co-equal sufferers of persecution (Acts 9:2 etc.), a tell-tale sign that they were community leaders in their own right.
4. Witness to the resurrection on one hand, and participation in the Spirit on the other, is the gospel foundation of all sacramental life. The question of what has been called 'sacramental assurance' is answered in the New Testament not by a theory about ministry – the NT is innocent of any explicit or developed linkage of ordained ministry and the sacraments – but by the fact that, with the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, the new creation has begun in which heaven and earth, and also present and future, now overlap. That is the ontological basis for sacramental assurance.
5. The biblical argument against the ordination (and, *a fortiori*, consecration) of women has tended to rest on a portfolio of texts often supposed to speak of 'headship' in a way which rules out women's ordination. In fact these texts – in I Corinthians 11 and 14, Ephesians 5, and I Timothy 2 – are by no means as clearly opposed to female ordination as their proponents usually make out. 'Headship' is in fact only mentioned in I Corinthians 11 (where it has to do with headgear worn while leading in worship – hardly an argument against women's public ministry) and Ephesians 5 (where it concerns the manner of mutual submission between husband and wife). The passage in I Corinthians 14, thought by some conservative textual critics on good manuscript evidence to be an interpolation, relates, even if original, not to ministry but to the good order of worship services in which, as in some Middle-Eastern churches today, local women might not always understand the language of public worship and might be inclined to chat amongst themselves. The famous passage in I Timothy 2 does not mention 'headship', and can properly be read, within a context (Ephesus) where the mainstream religion was female-only, as a warning against allowing women to usurp the proper ministry of men. In fact, the primary exhortation of I Timothy 2:11 is 'let the women learn' (the Greek *manthano* means 'learn, especially by study'), and is qualified with a phrase which can mean 'in silence' but equally 'at leisure': in other words, women must be given the space to study for themselves, an obviously revolutionary proposal in that age as in many subsequent ones, not least

because, in Paul's world as in Jesus', to 'study' would not be for one's own benefit alone, but in order to become a teacher of others. These arguments, so briefly sketched, are of course too brief to be conclusive, but should indicate that those who support the ordination of women to priestly and Episcopal ministry cannot be dismissed as treating scripture in a cavalier fashion, or as indulging in a fancy, exercising fancy hermeneutical footwork to imply that the text is now unimportant.

6. A second strand relates to the foundation of the theology of orders in Christology, rather than in the examination of the practice of the early church. The ordained ministry of the Church does not simply fulfil useful functions of oversight, leadership and service, such as are variously described in the Epistles: rather the ordained ministry focuses in those ministers the diaconal and priestly call of all God's people, a call that is founded in their baptism. They become what Austin Farrer called 'walking sacraments.' In speaking of our baptism, Paul is clear (Galatians 3:27,28) there can be no division between male and female: both have put on Christ. Which of the baptised then can represent Christ in the ministerial orders of the church, can stand in the *imago Christi*? Can it be only men, or would that be to confuse the universal Christ with the Jesus of history? There is a strong argument to say that only a ministry open to both men and women can properly represent Christ, who became, in the words of the Nicene Creed, *anthropos* (human), not *aner* (male).
7. A third strand develops the theology of creation and the new creation. The old dispensation has God creating human kind, male and female in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). Men and women have an equal dignity, and male and female are seen as complementary. Thus far we travel together. But if complementarity means differentiation of the two sexes by function, as is clearly expressed in Cardinal Kasper's paper, what does this have to say about how men and women are together made in the image and likeness of God? The true complementarity of the new creation surely envisages men and women working together, representing the unity of the divine image together, in a way that makes the kind of complementarity that Cardinal Kasper speaks of look more like a kind of Modalism. Certainly the place of the Virgin Mary in the theology of the Victorines is more robust than the traditionally passive one. When Hugh of St Victor describes Mary's part in the birth of the Saviour in *De Sacramentis*, he says

'Nor is the Holy Spirit himself to be called the father of Christ because his love operated the conception of the virgin, since He did not contribute the seed to the foetus of His own essence to the virgin but provided substance to the Virgin herself from her own flesh through his love and virtue.'
8. A further strand acknowledges the 'dynamic nature of tradition', and develops the notion of apostolicity in an eschatological direction, where it becomes more important to consider the church's apostolic witness not just in terms of historical perspective but as a sign of a redeemed creation. If there is 'an apostolic procession to the end of time', then women and men have an equally significant contribution to make to the apostolic mission of the church now, in the apostolic order.

The Faith as the Church of England has Received it

The faith that the Church of England has received is, as already indicated, the apostolic faith uniquely revealed in holy scripture, set forth in the catholic creeds, and witnessed by our historic formularies, including the Ordinal. It focuses on Jesus himself, and his unveiling of the Father through his kingdom-announcement and his death and resurrection, and on the sending of the Spirit through whom his followers are enabled to bear witness to him throughout the world. Announcing the Son in the power of the Spirit is the foundation of all Christian, new-covenant ministry. There is ample evidence in the earliest Christianity known to us that this ministry was shared by women. Nothing in holy

scripture, the catholic creeds, or our historic formularies makes it necessary to go against this primal witness.

How we move forward in these matters is a question of appropriate and careful strategy, granted our calling to guard the unity of the church. That we may, and indeed must, move forward is a conviction that can be reached, not on the basis of a casual or sloppy attitude to scripture and theology, nor in disregard for our ecumenical partners, but out of a deep conviction rooted in the gospel itself. It may be that the prophetic witness in this matter to which the Church of England is, we believe, called is a greater contribution to the unity of the whole people of God for which our Lord prayed so deeply.

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ⁱ John Zizioulas: *Being as Communion*, SVSP, NY, 1985, p152 and more generally pp149-154

See also John Zizioulas: *The ecclesiological presuppositions of the Holy Eucharist* (Nicolaus 10, 1982)

‘This Pauline ecclesiology which identifies Church and Eucharist so closely is developed further by St Ignatius of Antioch. What characterises Ignatius in particular is that the Eucharist does not simply make the local catholic community into the Church, but that it makes it the catholic Church (*katholike ecclesia*), that is, the full and integral body of Christ. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for Ignatius the catholicity of the Church derives from the celebration of the Eucharist. And this allows Ignatius to apply the term 'catholic Church' to the local community. Each local eucharistic community presided over by the bishop surrounded by the college of presbyters and assisted by the deacons, in the presence of the multitude (*plethos*), the people, constitutes the 'catholic Church' precisely because in it the total Christ is found in the form of the Eucharist.

After Ignatius the preoccupation of the Church with the danger of Gnosticism and other heresies forced her to emphasise orthodoxy as the fundamental and decisive ingredient of ecclesiology. Thus, the relation between Church and Eucharist seems to be weakened to some extent in the writers of the second century, though it is not absent from their thought. The situation is exemplified by St Irenaeus who regards orthodoxy as fundamental to ecclesiology while making the Eucharist the criterion of catholicity: 'Our faith (belief: *gnome*) is in accordance with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our faith' (*Adv Haereses* 4.8,5). It is mainly for this reason that in all ancient writers before St Augustine each local Church is called catholic, the full and integral body of Christ.

With St Augustine something seems to change in this respect. Striving with the provincialism of the Donatists, for the first time the term 'catholic Church' acquires the meaning, not of the local Church, but of the Church universal. This gives catholicity the meaning of universality, and with it a quantitative and geographical content instead of the original qualitative one.'