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The Authority of Scripture
 in the recent Practice of the Church of England

by

The Revd. Canon S. L. Greenslade

I GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Church of England is deeply committed by its formularies to the principle of the final authority of Scripture in all matters necessary for salvation. Article VI reads: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite necessary to salvation." Other authorities, though real, are subordinate to Scripture. Thus the Creeds are to be received because "they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture" (Article VIII), General Councils have sometimes erred, even in things pertaining unto God (XXI), Traditions and Ceremonies, though they may vary, must not be ordained against God's Word (XXXIV), and, in short, the Church, while having authority in controversies of faith, must not ordain anything contrary to God's Word written, and must not "so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another". (XX).

In accordance with this principle, the priest, at his ordination, not only undertakes to be diligent in reading and studying the Bible, but also declares himself to be persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all Doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and to be determined to instruct his people from the Bible and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, except what can be concluded and proved by Scripture. At his consecration a bishop makes the same declaration.

Throughout the controversies of the Reformation, and ever since, the Church of England has maintained this principle, but from the early 16th century onwards there have been differences, sometimes great, about its meaning and application. And it was soon recognized that there are problems about the spheres in which Scripture can be directly applied, about its interpretation, and therefore about the role of other "authorities" (whether reason or tradition or the present mind of the Church) in interpreting and applying it to the ongoing life of the Church.

In the early stages of the Reformation in England, one prominent use of the appeal to Scripture was negative in order to attack the Church of Rome: that is, certain doctrines and practices were held to be contrary to Scripture, others not required by Scripture as necessary to salvation, and therefore not to be laid down, even by the Church, as thus necessary. So, in practice, the English Church could continue to live in many respects by tradition. But from an early date there were always some who wanted the whole faith and life of the Church to be rethought in the light of the principle of the sole authority of the Bible, a desire which gathered strength from the experiences of those who fled to the Continent under Mary and which

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became more explicit and very powerful among the so-called Puritans from about 1560 to 1660. It was held, among other things, that the Bible demanded, and proved, a presbyterian pattern of ministry and provided a code of ethics and discipline which must be accepted and copied in minute detail, without alteration by the traditions of men. Many believed not only that you must do what Scripture commands (even in changed circumstances), but also must not do, or lay upon others as necessary, what it does not command, at least in matters of importance. This outlook furthered the already traditional practice of trying to settle an argument with the hammer-blows of proof-texts, isolated from context, though Puritan theologians were also greatly concerned with fundamental Christian principles. The challenge caused Church leaders (notably Archbishop Whitgift and Richard Hooker) to reconsider the nature of authority. There was much common ground. Almost all accepted the infallibility of Scripture in all its parts (all used proof-texts), and believed, like many of the Fathers, that what is necessary is plain enough. Most, probably, believed that Scripture is its own interpreter - not meaning by this that each individual discovers, and has a right to maintain, its meaning for himself, but that patient study, helped by the Holy Spirit, will lead to the truth without bringing in extra-biblical matter to settle difficulties. But important differences also were clarified. When arguing against the more biblicist Puritans, and not against Rome, those whom we may retrospectively call "Anglicans" made a much more explicit and elaborated use of tradition both in interpreting Scripture and in establishing and justifying institutions, practices, and sometimes points of doctrine, which are not directly laid down by Scripture. The distinction between Faith and Order was explored, Anglicans generally holding that, while the Church cannot impose as necessary to salvation, any doctrine not proved by Scripture to be such, it has authority in matters of Order, where these are not plainly determined by Scripture, and may, where it thinks fit, impose its decisions upon individuals for the sake of unity, both ecclesiastical and national. Similarly the distinction between essentials or fundamentals and secondary points of doctrine was explored, and this has remained a constant concern, in view of the Anglican desire for comprehension.

In historical circumstances of great difficulty, discussion of authority involved discussion of reason and freedom. Hooker tried to formulate the balance of authorities: Scripture fundamental, and ultimately binding, but the appeal to it requiring respect for reason and for the mind of the Church in antiquity and in general. This went a good way towards weakening the authority of individual proof-texts, as well as the claims of individual men to be Spirit-guided in isolation. At the same time it enhanced the possibility of genuine freedom. Against both Rome and the Puritans, Anglicans refused to define unless definition seemed imperative. In particular, no doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible (as distinct from assertion of its final authority) has been laid down; and no precise formulation of the authority of the Church has been promulgated, much being left to work itself out in practice.

Since Hooker, the Church of England may at times seem to have leaned much towards the authority of tradition (e.g. around A.D.1700) or towards rationalism (around 1750), but there has always been much direct, and often simple, reliance upon the Bible, working at all levels in the Church. To some extent, reliance upon Scripture, tradition or reason respectively has been the mark of parties within the Church, but there has also been a strenuous attempt to do justice to all three. A turning-point in this endeavour was the emergence of biblical criticism in the 19th century, which seemed to many likely to destroy the final authority of Scripture and with it the basis of Christian faith and practice. After much distress and some bitter conflict, especially over Essays and Reviews, 1860, the Church settled down by the end of the century to the acceptance in principle of biblical criticism, first of the Old Testament, then, more reluctantly, of the New. This has not led, as theoretically it might do, either to an extreme traditionalism or to mere rationalism. But few can appeal to Scripture quite in the older way.

The bulk of this paper will offer examples of recent practice when important issues, doctrinal or ethical, have had to be debated, especially in the decision-making organs of the Church. Afterwards some general statement will be attempted.

II THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD

This limited doctrinal issue provides a useful case study in which the appeal to Scripture by those taking part in official discussions can be examined.

i) Background and Procedure

Social changes in the position of women during the 19th century, including greater educational opportunities and the opening to them of such professions as medicine, stimulated a demand for better organization of women's work in the Church and a more professional attitude to it. It was mainly regarded as lay work, but in 1857 the establishment of the order of deaconess in the Church of England was proposed. This was done gradually, and some general recognition was given to it at the Lambeth Conference of 1897. For long the training and work of deaconesses received the most attention, but in time the theological question of their ordination and status was raised, and this led on to the question of ordaining women to the priesthood.

In 1917, with an eye to Lambeth 1920, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a commission to consider "The sanctions and restrictions which govern the ministrations of women in the life of the Church, and the status and work of deaconesses." Its work was understood to be purely historical and the commissioners did not deal with "questions bearing upon sex in comparative or speculative theology, nor with the reasons why women have never been ordained to the priesthood." Its report, with sixteen historical essays, was published as The Ministry of Women (SPCK 1919).

Lambeth 1920, recommending the formal restoration of the Diaconate of women, resolved that "The Order of Deaconesses is for women the one and only Order of the Ministry which has the stamp of Apostolic approval". The word "Order" should be noted, and the implication that the Priesthood is not open to women, if apostolic approval is the criterion. Lambeth 1930 resolved that "The Order of Deaconess is for women the one and only Order of the ministry which we can recommend our branch of the Catholic Church to recognise and use", but the relevant committee reported urgent pleas for the admission of women to the Priesthood, and, while it did not encourage them, believed that a fuller theological answer should be given to those who pressed for it. How live the issue was proved by the formation of the inter-denominational Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church in 1929, and by the memorandum, Women and Priesthood (1930), presented to the Lambeth Conference by an influential group of Anglicans who saw no objection in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood. Consequently the Archbishops of Canterbury and York appointed a Commission "To examine any theological and other relevant principles which have governed or ought to govern the Church in the development of the Ministry of Women." This received evidence from many societies and individuals, and produced its report, The Ministry of Women in 1935. Using arguments which will be considered below, it could not recommend the admission of women to the priesthood. Discussion of this report in the Upper (episcopal) House of the Canterbury Convocation centred upon deaconesses; it was agreed that their ordination confers a distinctive character and status with the permanence which belongs to Holy Orders. Discussion of this status continued, Lambeth 1948 and 1958 echoed 1930, and the new Canon Law of the Church of England (1969) states (D 1) that "the order of deaconesses is the one order of ministry in the Church of England to which women are admitted by prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop"; and that it "is not one of the holy orders of the Church of England, and accordingly deaconesses may accept membership of any lay assembly of the Church of England without prejudice to the standing of their order". Whatever the implications of this Canon,

ordination of women to the priesthood was receiving fuller discussion. Lambeth 1948 and 1958 by-passed it; Lambeth 1968 took it seriously. Some books and many pamphlets were written, conferences were held, lectures were given. The Report, Gender and Ministry, 1962, prepared by a working-party of the Central Advisory Council for the Training of the Ministry (CACTM), did not, despite its title, investigate the ordination of women as priests, but asked, as the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches had done, that the issue should be examined by theologians. During the Church Assembly's brief debate on this report it was stated that neither the working-party nor CACTM itself would dare to say that admission of women could never happen; the Church must be open to the Spirit. It was agreed to request the Archbishops to appoint a Commission, which was done, with the task of examining "the question of Women and Holy Orders". Its report, under that title, appeared in 1966 and was debated at length in the Church Assembly (February and July 1967). The arguments are considered below; no practical conclusion was reached, except that the most radical motion was heavily defeated, namely: "That this Assembly having weighed the arguments set down in the Report, judges that individual women who feel called to exercise the office and work of a priest in the Church shall now be considered, on the same basis as individual men, as candidates for Holy Orders."

Meanwhile a joint working party of CACTM and the Council for Women's Ministry had been set up, and reported with Women in Ministry, 1968. This dealt mainly with practical and canonical matters, but, while showing itself to be divided on the priesthood of women, affirmed that until the Church resolves this matter, it will be almost impossible to define women's part in ministry clearly (that is, presumably, even in other respects). At the Lambeth Conference of 1968 the relevant committee's report appears to favour ordaining women to the priesthood. The resolutions of the whole Conference were more cautious: they call for study and consultation with other Churches, and affirm that "the Theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive."

Had the Church Assembly proposed the ordination of women as priests (which it was in any case unlikely to do just before Lambeth) this would have been further debated, as involving doctrine, in the Convocations. Any further proposals will come before the new Synod of the Church of England, which will itself determine the course of debate and the methods of taking action; these would include, almost certainly, a reference to the Convocations of clergy sitting separately.

The above sketch is not merely a chronological record; it intends to bring out certain principles natural to the Church of England as at present constituted.

i) The whole issue, in principle and in detail, should be brought out into the open, and studied and debated throughout the Church at all possible levels.

ii) This debate and the literature thrown up by it should be reviewed by a carefully appointed commission, which would also take fresh evidence, whether at its own request or volunteered to it. The commission must represent clergy (bishops and others) and laity, and include those, men or women, with specialist knowledge or representing particular points of view.

iii) Their report should be published, and thus open to general criticism, and should be debated publicly in the constitutional bodies of the Church (the reference of the problem before us to the Church Assembly gave women the right to speak), and the debates should be published.

iv) Throughout it is assumed that Scripture and Tradition will be studied in the light of modern knowledge, and that account will be taken of the relation of the Church of England to other Churches, as well as of the immediate relevance of the subject discussed to the present mission of the Church.

v) Final decision is by a formal act of the Church through its representative organs, in which bishops, other clergy and laity all share, though the laity cannot impose a doctrinal decision upon the clergy.

vi) So far as practicable, there is constant interplay between the Church of England itself and the general opinion of the Anglican Communion as a whole, especially through the Lambeth Conferences.

III THE ARGUMENTS USED IN THE DEBATE ON THE PRIESTHOOD OF WOMEN, 1919 - 1968, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.

(a) It can be assumed that most of those who engage seriously in this discussion, clergy and laity, will have some knowledge of the methods of modern biblical criticism, and that in principle they accept the necessity of it, though with varying degrees of conservatism and radicalism as to its results. But there is also an instructed and articulate body of people whose approach to the Bible, though not necessarily "fundamentalist" or "infallibilist", is much more conservative.

On the whole, however, the documents here under consideration appear to make such critical assumptions as the following:

i) It is legitimate to question, and to try to decide by scholarly methods, whether the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were spoken by him, how the Gospels came to be written, and whether St. Paul wrote Ephesians and the Pastoral epistles.

ii) It is necessary to ask whether or in what sense the words believed to be dominical were influenced by the conditions of the Lord's humanity and environment (and similarly with the Apostles); and how far, or in what instances, biblical teaching and institutions were intended for their own time and may legitimately be modified in changing circumstances;

iii) Theological questions cannot be settled by mechanical citation of proof-texts. Individual passages must be studied in the light of biblical teaching as a whole; and account must be taken of the varieties of teaching.

In this critical study, Anglicans of course use the exegetical work of scholars of many countries and denominations.

(b) Particular passages.

It is agreed that Jesus did not value women as such less than men, that women are called to serve (diakonein) in various ways in the Church, that they are capable of receiving special gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that some "prophesied" in the Christian Church. It seems unnecessary to cite the evidence for this here.

It is agreed that Jesus did not appoint any women to be apostles, that the New Testament affords no instance of a woman holding the office of episkopos or presbyter (I Tim. 5:2, Tit. 2:3 are not regarded as exceptions) or exercising authority over men, and that St. Paul did in some sense subordinate women to men. It is not the facts here, but their significance which needs elucidation. It is also agreed that Phoebe, the diakonos of Romans 16, may have held an office, and that diakonoi of I Tim. 3: 8 - 13 may include women. In any case the propriety of having the office of deaconess in the Church is not disputed; it is the nature and implications of their Orders which is in question, and this is not decided by the above texts.

The most discussed passages and texts have been I Cor. 11: 2 - 16 with 14: 32 - 37; Gal. 3: 28 with Col. 3: 18, I Tim. 2: 11 - 15, and with Genesis 1 - 3; Ephes. 5: 22 - 33 with Gal. 4: 19 and Isaiah 49: 15, 66: 13.

i) I Cor. 11 and 14 and I Tim. 2 have two aspects, regulations for the ministry, and the subordination of women in general. We will consider first the regulation aspect.

The 1919 Report appears to draw no inference from I Cor. 11:5, rejects the suggestion that 14:34-5 may be an interpolation, and concludes briefly and without discussion that "If we may judge from I Cor. 14:34 ...and I Tim. 2:12, the Apostle did not sanction teaching in public by women." Here the possibility that Paul did not write I Timothy is not mentioned, and what lies behind the hedging "if we may judge from" is left unexplained. In Appendix I, Dr. Mason had tried to reconcile I Cor. 11 and 14: prophetesses may speak in the assembly; even prophetesses must keep good order; women in general (i.e. not prophetesses) should keep silent. I Tim. 2:12, he thinks, forbids not all teaching, but such as would imply sharing in the office of presbyter; this he derives from the following words, authentain andros. In App. II Miss Gardner dwells on the consistency of 11 and 14, and seems to think that Paul was driven by disorder at Corinth to forbid what he would normally permit. The principle which both scholars point to is the necessity of allowing for immediate circumstances.

The 1935 Report is brief here; it regards I Cor. 11 as referring to praying and preaching in public assembly, allows that cc.11 and 14 are inconsistent, and affirms that the Pastorals, whether by St. Paul or not, regard women as debarred by sex from being official teachers in the Church or exercising government over men (cf. Mason above).

The 1966 Report goes into more detail. c.11 does not deny that women may pray or prophesy at the church meeting; the argument concerns only veiling, and the appeal is primarily to custom. I Cor. 14:34-35 also appeals to custom, but here the Report allow that the position of these verses in the manuscripts presents a textual problem and that "it is a reasonable, but in no sense a necessary, deduction that they were first written in the margin and thence inserted by copyists." Possibly they are an addition in the spirit of I Tim. 2 by an early editor. If original, they are aimed against disorder at Corinth. The point is, what is most conducive to edification?

No appendix is devoted to the biblical evidence as such, though it enters into several. Miss Baxter appeals to the Lutheran tradition of exegesis of 14:34 which, with few exceptions, puts it on a par with the veiling of c.11, as a matter of order and decency, to be classified among things indifferent which are to be determined by the judgment of the Church of what is conducive to edification.

The Report of 1966 concluded that the New Testament gives no clear answer to the question whether women may be ordained priests. Consequently the Church Assembly debate of 1967 did not turn mainly on biblical details, and certainly did not treat Scripture as a book of regulations. Similarly the relevant committee of Lambeth 1968 did not argue from I Cor. 11 and 14 as rules. In both attention was drawn to the relation of the veiling and the silence of women to contemporary social custom. But the more theological aspect of these chapters received more attention, together with Gal. 3, Ephes. 5 etc. as listed above.

ii) So we must consider these passages again together with others which bear on the nature of male and female as such and may be relevant to the present issue. So far as possible, argument from Scripture will be distinguished from arguments from theological principles; in fact, they must merge. (OWP is used for Ordination of Women to the Priesthood). The arguments turn much upon passages expressing the subordination of woman to man in general, and in particular in marriage and the family; and upon the bearing of Gal. 3:28 as an expression of ultimate Christian principle upon attitudes to woman which may arise from Jewish tradition (including Genesis 1 - 3 and Rabbinic interpretations of it) and social custom of the New Testament period.

The 1919 Report itself states briefly (p.4) that while in certain passages, e.g. I Tim. 2: 11-15, I Pet. 3:6, the apostolic writers use arguments about women coloured by rabbinic exegesis, these have no bearing

on the ministry; and that while in Gal.3: 28 and Col.3: 11 St. Paul teaches that in Christ there is no room for distinctions of race, rank or sex, the work and calling of the sexes continue different. (I Tim.2: 11 - 15 should perhaps read 13 - 15, since v.12 is obviously relevant and is used by the Report, as above (i). Also these passages could be regarded as relevant when put with the "marriage" passages, Ephes. 5 etc.)

The Report echoes Dr. Mason's Appendix rather than Miss Gardiner's. Mason concluded (pp. 34 - 5) that to St. Paul equality of gift did not involve identity of use (though his "mystical reasons do not concern us at this point"); and that he associated authoritative teaching with the office of pastor or presbyter, for a woman to share in which would conflict "with the apostolic conception of the relation between the sexes". He allowed (pp. 37 - 8) that "those who consider themselves at liberty to criticise the apostolic teaching may object that the apostles were hampered by the traditions with which they grew up and by the outworn ethics of the Old Testament", whence they "regard the female sex as normally and by the divine constitution of things subordinate to the male". But he argues that St. Paul's language (man as head, woman from him and for him, Adam first, Eve second, etc. - is not an interim ethic like his teaching on slavery, but that, however quaint and rabbinic his illustrations may seem, he rests on the permanent truth that male and female are different, so that, although there is no difference in spiritual privileges, their tasks and functions can be differentiated in the form of "subjection".

Against the inferior status of Gen. 2 - 3, Miss Gardiner sets Gen. 1, where "man" comprises male and female. That is, both are in the image of God, and thus, in the order of creation, by nature equal. She does not deny that St. Paul regarded women as in some senses inferior, but claims that his specific teaching about them arose in part from his own personality and in part from Jewish tradition and custom.

She argues (pp. 50 - 1) that the point of the marriage analogy (Ephes. 5, II Cor.11) is not primarily the inferiority, but the bond of love uniting the two. She concludes, especially from Gal. 3: 28 where she emphasizes that male and female become one man (heis) in Christ, that St. Paul recognized spiritual capacities common to man and woman. "The difference in powers ... and the social rules grounded therein belong not to 'faith' but to 'the law' - not to 'the spirit', but to 'the flesh'".

This 1919 Report, though it comes to no theological conclusion, collects most of the scriptural passages taken up in later debates and indicates the lines on which they will be discussed.

The 1935 Report is rather slight on the argument from Scripture and tends to put questions rather than give answers. It asks whether the spiritual equality of Gal.3:28 entails identity of function. It declares that Gen.1, "male and female created he them", is as much a fact determined by the creative will of God as "in Christ there is neither ... male nor female" is a fact determined by His redemptive purpose. (That is, it does not use Gen.1 in Miss Gardner's way.)

The Report of 1966 is fuller. It states (para.19) that Gal.3:28, with its close parallels (Rom. 10: 12; I Cor. 12: 13; Col. 3: 11), is concerned with baptism. It does not explain the implications of this remark. It expounds I Tim. 2: 12 - 15 - despite Eve's guilt, women can be saved if they accept the position assigned to them by Gen. 3: 16 - and regards the historical background of this passage and prescription as uncertain; but does not draw any immediate conclusion (para.22). It points (23) to the certainty of St. Paul's belief that women are subordinate to men qua wives and mothers, especially emphasised in Ephes. 5 by the comparison with Christ as head of the Church. But, it concludes, "It remains unclear whether this principle of subordination is also applicable quite apart from the marriage relation" and whether it is necessarily "a bar to the conferring of valid orders upon women."

In chap. VI, which summarizes the argument used in favour of OWP, para. 66 affirms that arguments based upon the deficiency or inferiority of women or upon Pauline restrictions on the activities of women in the Church are no longer tenable. Para. 67 says that those based on parental or nuptial imagery must be treated with reserve, that against the subordination to the Bridegroom of Ephes. 5 must be set the maternal imagery of Isaiah 49: 15, 66: 13 and Gal. 4: 19, and that these metaphors do not decisively establish that the priestly function is exclusively male. Para. 73 sums up, "The Biblical evidence provides no evidence to justify the exclusion of women from the priesthood." The Commission as a whole does not commit itself to the case stated in this chapter VI. Chapter V similarly summarizes the case against OWP, but in that the argument is not conducted directly from individual passages of Scripture. It must be remembered that para. 18 did state, as the opinion of the Commission, that the New Testament gives no clear answer to the question of OWP (cf. p. 6 above).

In the accompanying essays, Dr. Demant (p. 99) writes that Gal. 3: 28 is often misinterpreted to support OWP, that it refers to baptism, and that lay-membership of the Church is not a mark of inferiority to ordination. (But this overlooks the distinction that if lay men are capable of ordination and women not, the inferiority lies not in the lay status as such, but in the incapacity). Miss Baxter (pp. 116-7) discusses more fully the parental and nuptial imagery (cf. Report para. 67) asking for caution in arguing from analogy and metaphor. As to the Pauline subordination and its roots in Gen. 2 - 3, she writes that Protestant theologians are not agreed whether the command that women should keep silence in church is an expression of a permanently valid principle, or a restraint imposed by first century conditions. A Christian theologian today is more likely to insist that husband and wife must be mutually subordinate, with an absolute self-giving on either side in which both obey. (That is, the analogy with Christ and the Church only applies in part.) (She notes, p.119, that until this century scriptural interpretation and the formation of the consequent tradition has mostly been in masculine hands, and almost exclusively of the ordained clergy.)

At the first Church Assembly debate (15.2.67.) the Bishop of Chester, who introduced the Report, pointed to its warning against "lifting passages of Scripture from their context and using them as proof-texts", and declared that the Commission did not think OWP can be assessed by any clear directive from the New Testament. (The reference to the New Testament, rather than to the Bible, should be noted.) Naturally, then, his introduction dealt mainly with other, non-biblical arguments, as did much of the debate.

On biblical points: Mr. Duffield (layman) argued that, if we are to avoid proof-texts by doing justice to context and background, Genesis must be fully considered as the background to the relevant Pauline passages, since St. Paul may have seen eternal principle there, e.g. in Gen. 3: 16. He did not wish to be dogmatic, but would have liked a more careful evaluation by the Commission. Dr. Jalland, expounding Gal. 3: 28, as directly concerned with Christian initiation, maintained that its connection with OWP is so slight that it can safely be disregarded here. He argued also from the kephale passage in I Cor. 11 that, so far as concerns function, the same theological distinction exists between male and female as between the male and his Redeemer, and that this distinction has its ultimate counterpart in the relations between the persons of the Godhead. This principle of kephalaiosis rules out the possibility of according to women spiritual functions which would make them kephale to men. Contravention is, for St. Paul, unthinkable and unknown to the Churches of God. Replying, Professor Lampe objected to Dr. Jalland's translation of Gal. 3: 28, and said that in I Cor. 11 St. Paul, hard pressed to find a priori theological objections to something he disliked, is reduced to saying, We have no custom. Professor Lampe did not regard catholic tradition as inherently unalterable except where it concerns the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

In the second Assembly debate (3.7.67.) Professor Nineham claimed that Professor Demant contradicts Gal. 3: 28 and reduces women to a second-class citizenship of the kingdom, which here St. Paul clearly denies. Professor Nineham applied Gal. 3: 28 beyond baptismal status to the practical implications of what Christ had done and been. St. Paul saw the principle involved in this, but it took the Church a long time to see its implications for Jew and Greek, then for slave and free, and even longer for male and female.

Mr. Riley summarized St. Paul's teaching as "That just as there was a differentiation of sexes in the first creation, so this remains with some new significance in the new creation, and that this has its implications both in the life of the family and in the liturgical and pastoral ministry of the Church." In the words of Dr. N. P. Williams he appealed "not so much to the thesis that it is dogmatically certain that women cannot receive Holy Orders, but... that there is an overwhelming probability based upon the example of Our Lord, the teaching of the New Testament and the universal tradition of the Church, that they cannot; and that no serious reason had been alleged for supposing that they can." Mr. Wenham returned to the theologically profound Genesis 1 - 3 in which Our Lord himself taught the early Church to find its understanding of the nature of men and women, as St. Paul in fact did. It is of divine order, not social custom, that man is the head of woman, solid biblical reasons for the ordination of women cannot be found. Dr. Jalland repeated that Gal. 3: 38 has no bearing on whether women should "administer publicly", and suggested that prophesying (I Cor. 11) may not mean preaching, but other more private spiritual exercises.

On the other hand, several speakers insisted that we are now free, on Christian grounds, to break from the customs which temporarily bound St. Paul. Thus, Mrs. Mayland: St. Paul must groan (when people quote him against OWP). Mrs. Moffet: We have been redeemed and do not need to go back to Genesis 3 to find reasons about OWP. Miss Pitt: The Book of Genesis is concerned very much with the Old Covenant. We members of the Assembly are living under the New Covenant - and the whole nature of the New Covenant was not necessarily understood by the first generation of Christians.

The Bishop of Bristol asked that the whole question of the place of sexuality in God's providence, should be responsibly and ecumenically discussed. His words should be quoted: "I understand the phrase 'conclusive theological reasons' to mean that there is nothing in Christian revelation which forbids it. It is at this point that we have to make up our minds on the biblical evidence on the extent to which the Christian tradition is tantamount to revelation" - and this needs common discussion with other Churches.

As explained above, the 1966 Report and the Assembly debates did not at once issue in a decision in principle for or against OWP. Lambeth 1968 had this material to consider in the light of the experience of other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The relevant committee found no conclusive theological reasons against OWP. The appeal to Scripture and tradition must be taken with the utmost seriousness. But the data of Scripture appear divided on this issue. St. Paul's insistence on female subordination, made to enforce good order at Corinth, is balanced by Gal. 3: 28. (Note the implications here that the subordination was conditioned by circumstance and that the application of Gal. 3 extends beyond baptism). Tradition, on this point, is held to have been shaped by assumptions no longer accepted. "The New Testament does not encourage Christians to think that nothing should be done for the first time." The paternal and nuptial imagery used by St. Paul, valuable in itself, is matched by his own use of maternal imagery in Gal. 4: 19. The Conference (Resolution 34) affirmed its opinion that the theological (this includes biblical) arguments as presented for and against OWP are inconclusive.

CONCLUSIONS from the Above Debate, so far as concerns the Appeal to Scripture.

The course of the discussions, 1919 - 1968, has made plain how the Church of England wishes such an issue to be handled. It wants the subject to be considered from every relevant standpoint: the teaching of Scripture and tradition, the mission of the Church in the modern world, including the spiritual edification of Christians, the restoration of Christian unity, the preaching of the Gospel to all mankind, the promotion of a Christian society. And it wants, before decisions are taken by its authoritative organs, the whole issue to be made public and to be studied and discussed at all possible levels of the Church, clergy and laity, men and women. It does not want to impose an authoritarian or an academic decision upon a passive laity; it wants the laity to study, think and speak for themselves.

In the present issue, because it must act in the modern world, it wishes to draw upon relevant modern knowledge, both the biblical and theological scholarship of other Churches and the special knowledge of modern physiologists, psychologists, sociologists, educationists etc.

That the discussions here considered have so far proved to be indecisive is due, in large part, to the (probably increasing) belief that direct scriptural evidence is itself indecisive on the point. Had Scripture given a clear verdict against OWP, then, in the present continuing respect of Anglicans for scriptural authority, the verdict would be accepted. If Scripture plainly and directly sanctioned it, the debate would have turned partly on tradition and partly (for many, mainly) on practical, including ecumenical, considerations.

The present paper tries to illustrate how Anglicans attempt to discover what Scripture teaches and in what sense particular statements are binding in an issue which involves Christian doctrine and calls for decision in practice. The arguments which, in the issue of OWP, led so many, including the Reports of 1935 and 1966 and of Lambeth 1968, to the conclusion that Scripture is not directly decisive provide an instructive example.

Some of the principal arguments should here be summarized:

- 1) Few passages deal directly with the issue. Use of these as proof-texts, more citation of which is decisive, must be avoided. We must see them in their immediate context, their historical background, and within the general teaching of Scripture.
- 2) This entails asking where Christian principles, revealed in Christ, transform or supersede the Old Testament; and where passages in the New Testament, even in St. Paul, are still too closely bound to the thought-background of the O.T. or to rabbinic exegesis of it.
- 3) St. Paul may have contradicted himself in I Cor. 11 and 14; if not, he has at least not thought the problem through. (And one must now be allowed to say this, despite Article XX).
- 4) St. Paul may be taking decisions for immediate action in particular circumstances, decisions which do not apply in other circumstances unless based on principles permanently valid and relevant to the changed circumstances.
- 5) In searching for his principles, it appears to many that St. Paul
 - a) is sometimes influenced by contemporary social custom or non-theological beliefs,
 - b) sometimes bases his beliefs about women on rabbinic exegesis of Genesis which we do not regard as in itself correct or authoritative,
 - c) expresses his teaching in images and analogies from marriage and family life which are not completely applicable to the issue of OWP, and which can be countered by his own use of other, e.g. maternal, images.

contd./....

6) Gal. 3: 28 must not be used as a proof-text any more than I Tim.2: 12. But here opinion divides, many regarding it as so crystallizing and focussing St. Paul's teaching on the work of Christ that it is an expression of fundamental principle and does, in fact, justify the Church in proceeding to ordain women; others restricting its application to baptism and spiritual status before God, but rejecting the extension to ordination.

7) In general, most of the discussion appears to move on the assumption (implicitly and without objection being raised) that there are different levels of authority within Scripture: all 'texts' are not equally 'inspired', simply by being within the Canon. Hence, for many, the force of I Tim. 2 is weakened if it is not Pauline but some decades later.

In view of such uncertainty, the appeal to Scripture is, for many Anglicans, essentially to the implications of its whole teaching on the nature of God, the work of Christ, and the mission of the Church. Thus the issue of OWP must be determined by the wider issues and needs which the Bible does make evident. To interpret particular texts and decide particular issues in the light of over-riding scriptural principles even if it entails going against some texts is the way to maintain the fundamental authority of Scripture, whereas servitude to such texts and neglect of modern hermeneutic would destroy that authority for educated people. Others fear that such methods lead to secularisation of the faith, whose purity is protected by closer adherence to the words of Scripture.

However that may be, it has been generally felt that, if Scripture leaves the issue of OWP open, one cannot proceed at once to the practical questions without evaluating the tradition of the Church. Here opinion has been divided.

Report 1919 recorded without discussion the fact that the restriction of the priesthood to men originated in a generation guided by special gifts of the Holy Spirit. The relevant committee of Lambeth 1930, though divided on the theology of OWP, did not think circumstances demanded a departure from the universal custom of the Catholic Church. Report 1935, puzzled about Scripture and unwilling to say that women are inherently incapable of Orders, believed that the general mind of the Church still accords with the continuous tradition of male priesthood, and was convinced that this consensus of tradition and opinion is based on the will of God and sufficient witness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Report 1966 posed as a question the force of new insights over against tradition, and summarised the facts of the tradition (paras. 27-30) without giving its verdict on its authority. In the Assembly debate the help to be gained from the tradition and experience of the universal Church was acknowledged, and very many wished no action on OWP to be taken without a large measure of concurrence with other Churches. On the point of principle, the authority of tradition, it is certain that both the position clearly stated by Mr. Riley (p.9 above) and that of Prof. Nineham and Miss Pitt (p.9) received in the debate, and would receive throughout the Church of England, considerable support, the balance of which cannot at present be estimated. The committee of Lambeth 1968 clearly discounted the force of tradition, but the Conference passed this over (p.9). Hence the importance of the Bishop of Bristol's words (p. 9).

We have thus observed, in a difficult case, an earnest attempt of the Church of England to grapple with the authority of Scripture in the light of reason (that is, using modern knowledge) and of the subordinate authority (Scripture not being decisive) of tradition. The attempt is so far indecisive; the process is informative.