

# a priesthood of both sexes

Paying attention to difference

Ali Green (SPCK, 2011)

'A priesthood of both sexes' is surely key to the future of the Church. This is Ali Green's main thesis, and this is a thought-provoking book about some of the places where men and women are working together well already, and some of the barriers which ordained women still face.

Green begins by referring back to her earlier book, *A theology of women's priesthood*, published in 2009. She sets out her aim for this book to answer the question: 'how does a theology built on sexual difference manifest itself in the life and ministry of practising priests and in the lives of those to whom they minister?' Green argues that for cultural reasons men and women experience the world differently, but this is not recognised by church culture, where 'male as norm'.

In chapters two to five Green looks at sexual difference and personal identity; how sexual differences affect God-talk; being and working together; and the relation between gender and personal development, including spirituality. The book looks mainly at the Anglican church, but has a worldwide as well as UK perspective, and the author draws on a wide range of contributions from women and men who are priests (plus a few who are bishops).

The book helpfully highlights some of the different ways in which women are disadvantaged in their journey towards priesthood or in their exercise of it, for example, in how women experience and pursue their calling, their experience of training, attitudes of male colleagues, excluding use of language, sheer opposition, and the way women are socialised, so that, for example, they are often reluctant to apply for senior posts. Each chapter draws on a wide range of viewpoints; some women recount positive experiences of men and women working together, others highlight the obstacles and difficulties. There is a brief section on 'taboo matters', such as sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Green notes that spiritual directors need to be sensitive to the particular issues women may have, in order to help them.

But I was a little disappointed. I found the focus on 'priesthood' rather narrow, and the author's constant use of the expression 'male T-for-G' (taken for granted) began to grate very quickly. I was surprised that while the tone of the book is mainly hopeful, it seemed to me to be overly negative, and does not seem to recognise that many male priests are as committed to collaborative ministry as (many) women are.

While cultural issues continue to affect expectations about women in the Church, I was disappointed that in chapters four and five Green draws mainly on old, essentialist, ideas of what men and women are like, while overlooking more recent research which suggests that in similar roles men and women tend to behave in very similar ways, and that differences in the way women and men behave have more to do with personality than gender. She cites Deborah Cameron's *The Myth of Mars and Venus* as a corrective, but in my view she does not do herself any favours by quoting books like *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps*.

A better theological underpinning for men and women working together, and a more robust theology in other places, such as differentiating language used for human beings from that used for God, would have made this a stronger book. But it is valuable for its stories of men and women working fruitfully together, and for its highlighting of how much still needs to change.

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