

doing leadership differently?

Women and senior leadership in the Church of England

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Introduction

One key question which was asked when women were priested in the Anglican Church was 'will women lead differently?' Indeed some people had argued for women priests on the basis that they would bring a different kind of leadership and ministry into the church. The same question is being asked again about women archdeacons and bishops: do women lead differently? And what difference will it make to have a number of women archdeacons, and ultimately of bishops in the Church?

Much has been written on the subject of women in leadership in the past few years, but little that is specifically Christian.

This paper will explore issues of leadership style and appropriate biblical leadership, starting from the observation that the New Testament sees no division by gender of spiritual fruit (character) or spiritual gifts (gifts, talents and 'roles'), and that Jesus is the leader whom all leaders must follow, both for men and women. Focusing on the Church of England, but of wider relevance, it will also explore how women's entry into senior leadership positions will enhance the Church by the addition of the experiences and gifts which women bring.

What is leadership?

Before I get any further, let me define a few terms. What do I mean by leadership? What is a leader? Some women would avoid the term 'leader' altogether, because it has been associated with particular styles of leadership. 15 or 20 years ago one reaction to a dominant style of leadership in the church and in other spheres became 'facilitation': 'we won't have a leader'. Emerging churches sometimes speak of having no designated leader, or of shared leadership. But even if a group has no designated leader, it will still be led! There will still be leadership!

Of course there is a multitude of definitions of leadership. Most are about how leaders *influence* others, and seek to *go* somewhere. The definition I'm working with has been developed over a number of years and comes from the CPAS Arrow Leadership Programme, an 18-month programme for younger leaders primarily within the Anglican Church.

Christian leadership is a servant oriented relational process whereby those who lead, under God's leadership, using their God-given capacity, seek to influence others towards a kingdom-honouring goal.

This emphasizes both relationships and goals, the servant attitude of the Christian leader, and the skills and competencies needed for leadership. What, then, of women as leaders?

Different roles for women?

Leadership for *women* is complicated by questions which men never face. All women have to think about what it means to be a woman in ministry; whatever church we belong to, our leadership is a challenge to nearly 2000 years of male leadership. One of the encouragements to me is the increasing evidence of women in diaconal and presbyteral roles in the early church and

increasing insight into what caused their gradual disappearance, which means that recent developments are more of a restoration of what was lost than an innovation.

Before I move on to consider this fascinating question of Do women lead differently? I want to see what the Bible says, if anything, about different gifts or roles for women. For many Christians this is the starting point for discussing women's ministry, rather than arguing from justice or pure equality perspectives.

In the last 10 years or so, some evangelical churches have placed an increasing emphasis on male-female difference, in so-called 'Biblical Feminism' promoted by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood through the Danvers Statement. This argues that 'distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order'. The CBMW material is not convincing, but it has influenced some churches on a variety of levels, and made it difficult for women aspiring to authorised ministry. This sort of thinking also lies behind the view of some conservative evangelicals in the Church of England.

To deal with this view briefly, there is no biblical doctrine of what constitutes 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in Scripture, and almost nothing about gender differences as part of the original created order. The male dominance mentioned in Genesis 3:16 is generally understood to be a prediction of how male sinfulness would manifest itself after the Fall rather than a *prescription* for male behaviour, and we can of course see this lived out both in the Old Testament and indeed in the whole of society.

Jesus came to reverse the effects of the Fall, and while he chose 12 men to be his inner core of disciples, he shows no tendency to see women as a group different in *kind* to men. When the crowds commend Jesus' mother, he draws attention to the importance of faith rather than of child-bearing. In many places he makes it clear that gender is irrelevant to the concerns of the kingdom of God. Then at Pentecost we see the Spirit poured out on both men *and* women, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel; and where Paul discusses spiritual gifts, there is no suggestion that these are not given as the Spirit wills to both men *and* women.

Where there do appear to be limitations on the role of women in ministry in Paul's writings, many recent commentators have demonstrated how these are not as they may seem at face value, and relate more to particular circumstances than to all women for all time. Nowhere do the Scriptures command us to develop our awareness of ourselves as males or females; rather, Jesus' teaching and the teaching of Paul's Epistles is intended to apply to all followers of Christ equally. And if we are all, both men and women, called to exemplify the fruit of the Spirit of Galatians 5, then it may be *men* rather than women who find – for example - gentleness or self-control a challenge!

So there is no *theology* of difference in Scripture, so far as gifts and roles are concerned. The next question, in thinking about how women lead, is, What should *Christian* leadership be like?

Biblical leadership

What has always made *Christian* leadership different has been that we model our leadership on Jesus, the one who came not to be served but to serve. In so many ways, Jesus presents us with a model to follow: a model of humility not ego, of service not status, someone who knew who he was, who had a clear vision of what God wanted him to do, who modeled what he taught, who equipped others to lead, who embodied love and warmth, and who was vulnerable. None of these things is gender-specific – and again the vulnerability of Jesus may be more of a challenge to men than to women.

Sadly, Christian leadership has not always looked like this. Too easily power, ambition, and self-

seeking have affected the church as much as they have affected other spheres of leadership. And while some women have reacted by rejecting the idea of leadership altogether, the solution to bad leadership is not no leadership but good leadership.

But there are some conundrums around Christian leadership which are not easily resolved: if power is made perfect in weakness, how are we meant to handle our strengths? When Jesus speaks of suffering and the world speaks of success, what is the appropriate response as a Christian leader? How do women follow Jesus' model of self-sacrifice when some do not have a 'self' to sacrifice? As those who have been excluded from many areas of leadership, how do we as women struggle and argue for our gifts to be used, but still in the spirit of Christ? How do we maintain *godly* ambition yet avoid *self-seeking* ambition?

I can't attempt to answer these now, but I register them as important questions. I want to move on to look at what recent leadership research can show us about women leaders.

Research on women and leadership

Leadership guru Tom Peters, in his recent book *Leadership*, entitles one chapter, 'Meet the new boss: women rule!' arguing that women constitute a woefully neglected source of leadership talent, and that they bring gifts which current business needs. Peters concludes that 'accelerating the movement of women into leadership roles is a... strategic imperative... of the highest order.'

Peters draws on the work of two women who have written on women and leadership, Helen Fisher and Judy Rosener. They have both concluded from their research that women and men have different gifts and that women bring to leadership talents such as emotional sensitivity, empathy, a penchant for long-term planning, a gift for networking, a desire to reach consensus, and a collaborative leadership style.

Rosener, writing in 1990, was one of those who sparked the current debate about women as leaders. She surveyed the way women came to break the glass ceiling in organizations, and found that the first female executives, breaking new ground, adhered to many of the 'rules of conduct' that spelled success for men. However, when a second wave made its way to the top, they adopted some of those same styles and habits, but also drew on the skills which they had developed from their shared experiences as women. This is important to register as we think about women trying to break the *stained* glass ceiling.

Fisher's book, *The First Sex* (1999), argues from an anthropological basis that women's special gifts of co-operation, patience, intuition and 'web' thinking are ideal for leadership in the 21st century and that working ideally with men, women will, as she puts it, 'change the world'.

Another important *British* piece of research in similar vein is by Susan Vinnicombe, based at Cranfield Business School. Her analysis of a number of male and female managers to assess their leadership styles concluded that taking a series of five types, the majority of male leaders were traditionalists (Myers Briggs SJ, liking systems and upholding traditional values), while more women fell into the categories of visionary (NT, intellectual, creative, problem-solving) and catalyst (NF, communicating personal care and enthusiasm). In working with people women are more collaborative and co-operative, and far less hierarchical and authoritative than men. In her most recent research, *Women with Attitude*, a study of nineteen business women, Vinnicombe notes that in male-dominated industries women lead in ways which are more similar to than different from men in those industries. But some of the most successful women leaders have resisted this trend, and among the common themes emerging from her study were a transformational style of leading, openness, being a team player, and care for staff and for their development.

Another key book is *The Female Advantage: Women's ways of leading*, by Sally Helgeson, which includes a study of Frances Hesselbein, whose role as leader of the US Girl Scouts is closer to leadership in the church than is analysis of leaders in business. Helgeson has some interesting conclusions about how women lead differently: working at a steady pace, but with breaks, rather than an unrelenting pace; not viewing unscheduled tasks and encounters as interruptions but as opportunities, keeping the long view in range rather than the day-to-day, and sharing information rather than keeping it to themselves. All interesting observations as we think about church leadership.

So – the conclusion of all this new thinking on women as leaders is that women *do* lead differently. But as we consider how to relate this to leadership in the Church and the debates we are involved in, we need to look carefully at the 'small print' in these studies. Fisher is an anthropologist, and cites scientific studies which document biological and scientific differences between men and women. But she and others note that there are many exceptions, and she makes it clear that she thinks that all of us are a complex mixture of feminine and masculine traits. There is a continuum of hormone levels, and environmental forces then take up the job of making us who we are.

So when we think about these conclusions of women leading differently, it's assumed this stems from a mixture of nature *and* nurture. And what is developed, can change, whether we are thinking of men or women. So this in turn raises interesting questions about the future of leadership; it has been suggested that, as spheres and responsibilities of men and women become more blurred, boundaries between masculine and feminine will blur also.

Women leaders in the Church

I find all this fascinating as we think about women in the Church and the potential of women in leadership at a variety of levels. I'd like to present two research projects at this point. The first was carried out ten years ago when I surveyed women who were leading church plants. This year I have asked similar questions about leadership styles to women who have been through the Arrow Leadership Programme, women clergy in a couple of dioceses, and women leaders in my organization.

First, women church planters. A brief summary of my findings:

1. Roughly half the women I surveyed thought there was no difference between male and female leadership styles; it was all down to personality.
2. The other half thought there *were* differences. They felt that women have a more inclusive and sharing leadership style, seeing themselves as enabling leaders, with gifts of teambuilding and encouraging. They thought women preferred to work incarnationally, starting with people and community, and gradually growing church. They also thought that women exhibit greater sensitivity to people.
3. The women surveyed were keen to find their own style, and not just to copy men, but lacked role models.
4. Two male church planting 'experts' both observed that women had more of a servant mentality, were more patient, and would persevere in the hard places, not feel they had to be a success and make a name for themselves.

Analysing these responses, the 'differences' seem as much due to nurture, i.e. experience, as any possible 'natural' explanation.

Moving on to my recent research, based on women who are mostly of incumbent status, the dominant theme is again that different styles are more to do with personality than with gender.

1. Most of the women spoke of any differences as to do with differences of personality, yet also spoke of some aspects of style common to most women.
2. Differences they noted included women being more democratic, more collaborative and better at delegating and team building.
3. More concerned with pastoral issues, better at reading people.
4. Less motivated by power, status and ambition, and seen as more approachable than men.
5. Women tend to be less confident than men. And concern for family and a balanced life tends to be more of an issue for women than for men.

Other research on women as leaders

What other sources of thinking do we have on this question of women as leaders? In Ian Jones' study *Women and Priesthood in the Church of England 10 years on*, there is a short section on gender issues. Again, what the respondents noted was that different life experiences gave different insights which might be used in ministry – in other words, again differences are more about nurture (i.e. experience) than nature (anything to do with biology).

Other published material makes similar points to the findings above. One of the most interesting explorations of these issues is in a paper by Anne Dyer in the journal *Anvil*, in 1999. She notes that the first women to be ordained priests had spent years as assistants, and it was not surprising they had learnt the skills of collaborative ministry. Women are not necessarily more collaborative than men, and we needed to wait longer to see if women lose their ability to work in teams once they moved into sole-responsibility posts. At the same time she granted that there are both women and men who hold collaborative styles in high regard; and I would concur with her that a more empowering and collaborative style is a continuing trend which women (and some men) are taking into incumbencies, even in the face of congregations who are used to a more traditional style.

Men and women in leadership together: the future of the Church?

Within 5 or so years, half the clergy in the Church of England will be female. But what will the leadership of the Church look like, at local and national level? The picture of women's deployment does not look as healthy as that statistic might suggest. The majority of OLMs (Ordained Local Ministers) are women, the majority of NSMs (Non Stipendiary Ministers), and a high proportion of those in sector ministry. This means that only about 16% of stipendiary clergy are women (2004). There are no women bishops, 9 archdeacons, 2 deans, 14 residentiary canons, and as of 2005 68 rural or area deans were women (out of 697). Viv Faull noted in a recent lecture that 'women are particularly represented in roles which are local, flexible, family friendly, voluntary, junior and of recent creation. Women are much less represented in stipendiary, senior roles or ancient institutions.' So there is a long way to go.

Many people in the Church, both men and women, have looked forward to the changes which having women in leadership will bring. But some studies suggest that a critical mass of women in an institution is needed before the norms change. And there is a need to see women leaders at all levels in the Church as a strategic (and biblical) necessity, not a reluctant concession to demands of justice. There is more work to be done!

The introduction to *Enlightened Power*, a collection of 40 articles on aspects of women's leadership, says this: 'Our resounding vision is one of organizations that invoke the full participation of men and women leaders ... we are changing the nature and use of power through our use of enlightened power – that which is manifest as we enact inclusive leadership that brings to bear the full and equal partnership of men and women leaders'. It would be great

if the Church, which has been entrusted with perhaps the fullest vision of this equal partnership, could have shown the way. As it is, as we open up new possibilities for women in leadership in the church, we now have new opportunities to learn from our sisters and brothers who have paved the way in other fields.

Just a few examples of how the gifts of women might enhance the church today:

In our changing culture: Church decline figures speak for themselves, and the church is increasingly out of touch with society. Women appear to bring long-range and strategic thinking, needed as we address the future.

Challenges of finance and clergy deployment: many dioceses have responded by renewed emphasis on collaborative ministry, ministry leadership teams, etc. which women appear to be gifted at.

The need for unity in the face of division. There is evidence that women use more democratic, inclusive and unifying strategies and could be a real key to unity, rather than, as so often argued in the debate about women bishops, a source of *disunity*!

Leadership is inevitably about power, but so-called enlightened power such as it is argued women bring to leadership is perhaps closer to Christian leadership than leadership thinking has ever been before. Masculine power has too often been 'power over', whereas a better use of power is 'power to', a life-giving, enabling force; we may rightly aspire to a power that can be used to change things and empower others. Of course women are human – we are as capable as men of *bad* leadership! But we have much to bring that is still denied.

Conclusion

There are two answers to the question Do women lead differently? Put simply, Yes and No! And to some extent the jury is still out on the answer. My own research seems to lead away from a theology of, and arguments about, difference. But in one sense, whichever answer I choose, they lead to the same conclusions! If we accept the argument that women bring something different to leadership, then the differences they bring are undoubtedly good news for the church and we might well echo Tom Peters in stating that 'accelerating the movement of women into leadership roles is a...strategic imperative...of the highest order.' If on the other hand women's leadership style is the product of personality rather than difference, then there is an equal need to see women take their place alongside men.

Alison White, in her contribution to *Jobs for the Boys*, wrote this: 'I think one of the greatest gifts of ordained women is their innate sense of 'we can do things better together.' It's hard to avoid glib generalization, but this thread runs through so much of what has been written. In answer to that question, Do women lead differently? one answer is, that much is related to personality rather than gender, but women (more than men) tend to say, 'we can do things better together.'

And this is, finally, what we should expect as Christians trying to define the essence of Christian leadership. There is something about the nature of God which is reflected in maleness and femaleness together, not in being a male or female separately, or being more male than female. And if, for example, purposefulness is a male tendency and relational connection is a female tendency, then the Godhead is purposeful and relational. It would be wrong to suggest that one of these tendencies, what is reflected in maleness, is more like God than the other. Since God is in a Trinitarian relationship, to be truly human is to experience both male and female tendencies. In other words, humanness is the combination of maleness and femaleness. Thus the ideal leadership is in this togetherness, which also consists of a unique blend of experience and personality which women and men together offer the Church.

One way of seeing the Fall and the beginning of the gender war is to see that it precipitated for

all of human history a tendency for men and women to move against each other rather than serve each other. When women and men find redemption in Christ, then those tendencies should be channeled back into working with one another. The gender wars began in the Garden, but should end at the Cross. When women's *and* men's voices are heard and valued at all levels, we may get nearer to creating a Church and churches that are places of mutual trust, connected intimacy and shared power.

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