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## Women Preachers, Divorce, and a Gay Bishop—What’s the Link?

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**Tuesday, August 5, 2003**

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Without repeating those arguments here, I would draw attention to a portion of the debate that covered new ground. Responding to my claim that the election of a homosexual bishop would lead to schism in the church, Susan Russell responded by pointing to the controversy over the Episcopal Church’s 1976 decision to ordain women: “The same threats of schism were all around, and in my experience as an ordained woman in this church, the ordination of women has only strengthened our ministry and enhanced our ability to proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ to those yearning to hear it.” She added: “I believe this step forward on behalf of gay and lesbian people will do the same thing.”

The anchor gave me the opportunity to deny Rev. Russell’s linkage of these issues, but I had no intention of denying the link. As a matter of fact, this linkage is about the only argument upon which honest conservatives and liberals can agree. It comes down to this: The arguments used in support of the ordination of women require the dismissal or “reinterpretation” of specific biblical texts which disallow women in the teaching office. The same is true of arguments for the ordination of divorced persons—and for homosexuals.

I am not accusing all proponents of women’s ordination of supporting the ordination of homosexuals. But I am insisting that the basic hermeneutical approach (method of interpreting the Scriptures) behind these arguments has a common core—a relativizing of prohibitive biblical texts in the name of “liberation,” whether of women, or divorced persons, or homosexuals.

Of course, the Anglican communion (of which the Episcopal Church USA is the American branch) is still divided over the question of women as priests and bishops. The Episcopal Church’s decision to ordain women did not lead to greater unity among the Anglicans.

The Episcopal Church made its decision to ordain women when it met in Minneapolis almost 30 years ago. It now meets in Minneapolis again, and faces a decision of equal magnitude. Professor Carter Heyward, who teaches “queer theology” at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA., was a central figure in the debate over women’s ordination in 1976. She makes the link clear when she states: “It was a different convention center, but the same script.” [see Washington Post article] In the end, those churches ordaining women have already surrendered a crucial biblical defense against the ordination of homosexuals. Clearly, some of these churches will do their best to hold the line, but the Episcopal example is not in their favor.

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