Editorial

Now that the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood is an accomplished fact, the next move appears to be a drive, emanating almost exclusively from evangelical circles, for something which they call 'lay presidency' at the eucharist. What this means is that lay people, that is to say persons not in Holy Orders, should be allowed to celebrate Holy Communion within the canonical and legal limits imposed by the Church of England. The Australian diocese of Sydney, which firmly opposes the ordination of women, has given its backing to this idea, and it is known to be widely popular among the sort of evangelical Anglican who declines to wear clerical robes when leading worship. If traditional Anglo-Catholicism really is effectively destroyed by mass defections to Rome over the next few years, it would appear that 'lay presidency' would have some hope of being accepted. But what form would it take and what effects would it be likely to have in practice?

For a start, there is not chance that General Synod would ever approve of lay celebration of the Eucharist along lines analogous to the lay administration of baptism (normally in an emergency only). The two cases are not really parallel, and nobody would wish to see eucharistic presidency open to any baptized Christian, regardless of other consideration. So there would have to be some procedure for authorizing certain lay people to celebrate, so that there would in practice be a kind of semi-ordination reserved for people with some kind of qualification. Lay readers and Church Army personnel would be obvious candidates, along with parish workers and the like. Perhaps the only real area of debate would be over churchwardens and members of the parochial church council, where the impermanence of their office, as well as the absence of special training required for it, might rule out so exalted a liturgical function.

In any case, definite limits would have to be imposed which would blur but not remove the distinction between clergy and lay people. One of the difficulties with this is that the most ardent supporters of lay celebration do not believe that such a distinction ought to exist. They are generally opposed to any form of clericalism, even when they may have to rely on it to impose their democratic views on lukewarm congregations. Not everyone in the pew wants to see the vicar in a business suit or in jeans—at least not at times of worship. (One of the little-known advantages of clerical dress is that it is possible to wear shorts underneath it in hot weather without being detected—something which is common practice in the warmer parts of the Anglican Communion!) Any conceivable form of lay presidency would be no more than half a loaf, and it is difficult to see the zealots being satisfied with this.

From the theological standpoint, arguments about the 'priesthood of all believers' are inappropriate for several reasons. First, the word *priesthood* is not used in the same way in each case. The biblical reference is to a sacrificial function, which Evangelicals are determined to eschew in the ministerial context. The biblical phrase is also referring to witness in the wider world, not to liturgical functions within the context of worship. Finally, the issue of lay celebration is not about the qualification of the minister but about the character of the ministry, which is not at all the same thing.

Evangelicals believe that the sacraments are an extension of the ministry of the Word, a point which ought to be clear in worship. Unfortunately, the habit of letting one person preach and another celebrate does nothing to bring out this inner link, and Evangelicals are as inconsistent here as anyone else. Nevertheless, there ought to be a much firmer grasp of this basic connexion, which would entail greater control over who is allowed to preach, as well as (possibly) greater latitude in the matter of celebration. The ministry of the Word ought to be exercised only by those with an adequate spiritual and theological preparation. Normally this would include a course of academic study, but it need not in all cases, and the Church must retain the freedom to recognize a spiritual gift even when it does not have a diploma certificate attached to it. However, such cases will be few. The norm will remain a period of training, accompanied or followed by an apprenticeship on the job, to test the actual fit. Such training may be offered to a wider variety of church members, but any way you look at it, a form of ordination—and therefore a degree of clericalization—is still with us.

Proponents of 'lay presidency' ought to realize that what they are going to get, if they get anything at all, is a broader form of the clerical estate, not a democratic free-for-all. If they can accept such practical limits to their enthusiasm their ideas may stand a chance in the General Synod. But if they cannot, because it means a fatal compromise of their basic principle, then it seems clear that they are on a hiding to nothing.

GERALD BRAY