

## Including us in – the Gentiles (Acts chapter 10)



Peter had a vision of creatures regarded as unclean by the Jews, and was given the message “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” He did not at first understand what this meant, but then he received a message from another man who had also had a vision: Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Cornelius was a “God-fearer”, a non-Jew who nevertheless

had accepted many of the tenets of the Jewish faith. He had been instructed by an angel to invite Peter to his home.

It went against the Law of the Jews to enter the home of a Gentile (see John 18: 28). Cornelius, although a God-fearer, was also a senior NCO of the occupying Roman army. Remembering his own vision, however, Peter accepted the invitation and went to preach the Gospel to Cornelius, along with his family and friends. The Holy Spirit fell upon them and they spoke in tongues and praised God. Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?", and ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus the Church ceased to be a Jewish sect and became a movement for all the people of the world.

When I was training for the Methodist ministry, our denomination had only recently voted to begin ordaining women, who were therefore still very much a minority in our colleges. We used to joke that each tutor group had to have its one "statutory woman". Years went by before the Anglicans accepted women into the priesthood, but since then I have had the privilege of working alongside a lot of women clergy, of our own and other denominations. In many places now, including our own Circuit, they outnumber the men.

Much of the Christian Church has still to accept the ordained ministry of women, for various reasons. For me, though, there is one overriding reason why all the offices of the Church should be open to women just as much as to men, and that is that their ministry has been blessed by God. I have seen the Holy Spirit acting through them, and that is enough for me. Peter could not deny baptism to Gentiles who had clearly been filled with the Holy Spirit. I, for one, cannot understand how anybody could deny ordination to women in whose ministry the Holy Spirit is clearly at work too.

**A prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the women and men whom you have called to serve as deacons and presbyters in our churches. Guide and empower them by your Holy Spirit, especially as they face new challenges and problems in these difficult times. Enable us all to work together for your kingdom, each one of us playing her or his part as a member of Christ's Body on earth. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. AMEN*

**- Rev John Barnett**

**Image:** Peter's vision of a sheet with animals (Domenico Fetti 1589-?)