In their book *Bread Wine and Women*, Susan Dowell and Jane Williams (1994) make it clear that one of the main sets of questions concerning the women’s ordination debate “is to do with the nature of women and men: what are the differences between them and what theological significance do they carry?” (p. 6) They concentrate their answer in terms of whether females can be an icon of Christ and the extent to which Christian tradition has wrongly stereotyped women. They argue that “much of the opposition to women priests was based upon an assumption that priesthood is ‘inappropriate’ for women, because priesthood expresses God’s outgoing, creative dynamic aspect, and all those characteristics are assumed to be male.” (p. 33) Their analysis predates the decisions in both England and Wales to ordain women to the priesthood and they reflect the views both of those who think gender makes no difference and those who think it either does or should.

Now that the decisions have been taken, there is a tendency to assume that such arguments have been superceded by events, but it could well be argued that the issues at stake here are important enough to require a reexamination in the light of empirical data. Accordingly, in this paper I shall set out what I see as the questions to be addressed, and then see how useful are the findings of Francis and Musson in providing illumination for them. In the process this may provide a model for the relationship between psychology and theology and particularly as it relates to the relationship between gender and ecclesiology.

Since the term *ecclesiology* can be used in several ways, I shall first set out the basis of my own intended use of it, which derives essentially from the New Testament. There ecclesiology is a combination of four elements:

i. Having an understanding of who Jesus is, as the tradition in which they stand has ability to describe it: that is, the *Christological* element.

ii. Having an understanding of the way in which God is thought to intervene in human history and affairs, both individual and corporate as the tradition in which they stand has ability to describe it: that is the *eschatological* and *soteriological* element.
iii. Having a strategy which deals with the question of the *relationship with the tradition*. In other words, what elements of community life demonstrate continuity with past religious (e.g. Old Testament) traditions, and what represent disjunction, and

iv. The *context* (in its widest sense) in which the community is set.

It is this combination which produces an understanding of what the church *is* and *does*, how it orders its ministry and how it arrives at its liturgy. The writings of the New Testament demonstrate several ecclesiologies thus understood. We shall restrict ourselves to two examples. In the writings of Luke we are made aware of a Church History, seen against the background of the whole history of Salvation. Since Conzelmann (1960), it has been commonplace to accept a division of the latter into three epochs, evidenced in the Gospel and Acts: the time of Israel, the time of Jesus and the time of the Church. These epochs are separate but related. Luke’s idea of the church is of God’s new people who are neither ‘laos’ (a term which normally refers to the Jews) nor ‘Israel.’ ‘Israel’ and ‘People’ are old conceptions, their oldness being emphasised by Stephen and Paul’s rejections. There is a constant search for new terms. ‘Saints of God’ is now a favourite term (Acts 9:13, 32,41 26:10). Others include, Disciples, Brethren, Believers and of course ‘Christians.’ (11:26) Ekklesia, though used often, has an exclusive sense only once (Acts 20:28). Elsewhere it refers to various sorts of gathering.

The way that ecclesiology is reflected in structure is summed up by Schweizer (1961) who sees three lines of thought. a) Church Order changes in accordance with the stage of development, b) it makes apparent the continuity with Judaism and c) it brings out the newness of what God has created. The commissioning of the Deacons in Acts 6 is a good example of the principles in action. Special office is granted to no-one but the Apostles who represent a particular stage in Salvation History. They are eyewitnesses and their successors are members of a new epoch. Each new situation necessitates a new form of service. “What Luke feels to be essential therefore, is not to point out the origin of a constitutive office of the church, but to write an account of a church that is prepared to be shown new and unaccustomed ways and also to take them; and then individual members must be separated for these special tasks.” (Schweizer 1961, p. 73).

An second and very different example is provided by the Pastoral Epistles. Their ecclesiology could well be described as ‘static.’ That the church is static is reflected in the sort of terminology used to describe it. It is a social entity akin to the family (1 Tim 3:5,12) or the household (1 Tim 3:15). It has dug in to combat heresy and in the process moved from organism to organisation. In this situation the Church is guarantor of truth and right doctrine. There is no mention of a living tradition. The Church order reflected