

General Synod Report

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Yesterday ended with Pensions but this was unfinished. Today the final approval was granted to a new Pensions Measure. As far as I understand it this relates to the use made of particular funds held by the Commissioners but I'm afraid some of the detail passed me by. Later in the day was also Pensions, this time a report on Pensions that was closely related to the issue of Stipends discussed yesterday. The details of this will now also be sent out for discussion in Dioceses and Parishes by 30 June 2002.

The main business of the morning was a report on Church Schools that was introduced by its chairman Lord Dearing. This was generally well received and commended to the wider Church. The hope is that the Church of England will seize the opportunity to create more Church Schools. One interesting comment came from David Bird who is (or was) the Chairman of CPAS. He asked a question which I suspect we are usually afraid to ask - is there any evidence that Church Secondary Schools lead to more people becoming Christians! He wondered whether they might rather be like vaccinations - you get a small dose when young so that you don't catch the disease when you are older.

Towards the end of the morning came a debate on Resolution B. This, if passed would have lead to a new Measure (which would require a full three-stage process in Synod and Parliamentary approval). The proposal related to the current situation where within a Team Ministry a parish within the Team which passes Resolution B can prevent a woman being appointed as a Priest with the cure of souls anywhere in the Team. This does appear inequitable but as was carefully explained by Professor David McLean it was deemed to be the only way forward ten years ago. Otherwise Teams would exist where some clergy (the women) could not minister everywhere. Many of us saw the danger of the change in chipping away at the significance of Resolution B which relates much better to evangelical understanding of the issues surround women priests. We were also fearful that new legislation might lead to wholesale change.

In the Bishop of Ludlow and three key lay folk all in favour of women priests spoke against the change at this stage and the Synod wisely passed to next business.

At some stage in the day the Weekday Lectionary was authorised until the end of 2007 whilst work on the new one is completed. I'm sure you will be relieved to know that there is no danger of the Weekday Lectionary becoming illegal without you noticing.

Final Business of the day was the report on Resourcing Bishops. This contains well over 100 proposals some quite detailed and I have to say from what I can say most of them fairly sensible. The aim is to make things more transparent, wherever possible transferring control to the Dioceses rather than the Commissioners and ensuring a more consistent national system.

There were two others matters during the day that I think are worthy of note.

At lunchtime I attended a meeting of the Catholic Group on ARCIC and Authority. It was interesting to hear the Bishop of Chichester say that part of the reason for not pressing for full unity with Rome immediately is the concern to ensure that others, ie. evangelicals, are embraced in the unity process. In the end the meeting drove home afresh the problems: We disagree fundamentally about what it means to be a Christian. We disagree fundamentally about the nature of Authority and in its particular outworking in terms of the authority of councils or individuals. Sadly, many think that the issues that caused the Reformation are now largely dead. No doubt we as evangelicals have contributed to this perception.

Secondly, I may have commented on the list on Monday about the answer to a question regarding the abolition of the BSR and the way in which the Chairman of the Board (the Bishop of Southwark) had raised the matter of expenses claimed by an individual member of the Board. Many members of Synod, from across the theological spectrum, had been disturbed by this and had spoken to Philip Gore the BSR member who was evidently in the Bishop's sights. As a result Philip was encouraged and made a very careful and moderate 'point of personal explanation' to the Synod.

The Bishop then had a right of reply and so disgraceful was his reply that no-one applauded and a number of members called out 'shame'. He showed a complete lack of understanding at why so many people were horrified by his original remarks and no remorse whatsoever at what he had said.

The episode that led to this matter in the first place was the decision by the BSR to make a public statement on the controversial issue of decriminalisation of cannabis without consulting the Board, disregarding the views of the Church in former debates and relying principally on the views of one well known supporter of decriminalisation who is, as I understand it, also from Southwark.

I remember attending a meeting of the Evangelical Patronage Consultative Council shortly after Tom Butler was translated to Southwark. I and others at the meeting

were left with the very definite impression that the Bishop considered the Diocese to be his personal empire and he was not overly interested in legislation (the Pastoral Measure) that prevented him moving clergy around according to his own whims. These recent events suggest to me that he views the BSR in much the same way.

County Durham likes to describe itself as 'The Land of the Prince Bishops', it is not the only such land.

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