

General Synod Report

Date : 11 July 2003

Source : EVNEWS Items

The July Group of Sessions of the General Synod began this evening at 8pm. The opening business was the normal welcome and introductions.

With the furore surrounding the appointment and then withdrawal of Jeffrey John there was far more media interest than normal and many more camera crews floating around. However, there are few points on the agenda where the issue of homosexual practice may come up therefore the media is more interested in how this matter has affected the relationships between members of the Synod and in particular the impact on discussions outside the chamber.

The customary debate on the **Business Committee Report** (what used to be called the debate on the agenda threw up a number of points of interest.

It was reported that the Rochester report on **Women Bishops** would be brought to the Synod some time in 2004.

It was also reported that there had been a lot of presentations regarding the appointment of the Bishop of Reading. It was acknowledged by the Chairman of the Business Committee that there had been a case for an emergency debate because many saw the consecration of Jeffrey John as a disaster. However, he stated that 'the situation is now different' because it was no longer time critical. It was stated that the report **Issues in Human Sexuality** should come before Synod in February or July along with the study guide to be issued later this year entitled 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality'. It is possible to read this statement as implying that part of the reason for asking Dr John to step down is that there would have had to be a debate allowed at the Synod had it being going ahead. The Archbishop of Canterbury stated later that he and the Archbishop of York, who make the decision about emergency business, were mindful to accept the advice of the Business Committee. He also stressed that people needed time to reflect on the matter. Further, he rightly stated that at this point a debate would be too likely to focus on people rather than principles.

In February the Synod had moved to next business on an item from Birmingham Diocese entitled **Gender Neutral** Titles. This had been done because of the emergency debate on Iraq although there were also a lot of people who thought the Birmingham motion absurd. However, it was considered bad form not to give time to a Diocesan motion. Therefore the Synod decided, with a substantial number against, to allow reconsideration of the matter.

The **report on theological training** also attracted attention. Curiously this report does not have a take note motion, simply a motion to accept the proposals. Moreover, some of those submitting amendments had been told they had to be changed because they have financial implications. At a group meeting earlier in the day there had been some very animated discussion on this report which by no means fell out along party lines. There is a lot of consternation regarding this report and it looks quite possible that it will be thrown out completely. Those in favour appear to be trying to salvage something decent out of theological training as the Church of England continues its slide into oblivion. There are many different reasons why people are against it including the threat to distinctive training, cost, the threat to married ordinands and most of all the centralising tendency which runs through the report.

The final business was the initial discussion about the guidelines for the professional conduct of the Clergy.

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Synod representative for St. Alban's Diocese.