

General Synod Report Friday at York University

Date : 8 March 2005

The General Synod July Group of Sessions began at 3pm on Friday 8th with the customary welcomes and announcements about the progress of legislation. Words of encouragement were offered to John Sentamu currently present at Bishop of Birmingham but soon to be Archbishop of York.

The debate on the report on the Business Committee is normally an opportunity for people to speak about what was not on the agenda but in their opinion should have been.

The first substantive issue of the Synod was the second report of the Ordination services Revision Committee. There was no debate on the main report but five amendments to the services were proposed on three issues – the use of the confession, the place of the giving of the Bible and the title of the service. All three issues had been agreed by Synod in February but the Revision Committee had refused to accept them and brought them back to Synod for a further try.

Professor Tony Thistleton proposed the two motions on Confession. One of these was accepted without much resistance. The second concerned whether a confession 'may' be used or, as Tony requested, that a 'confession' should normally be used at the Ordination service, given that this includes the administration of the Lord's Supper. Extraordinarily the Revision Committee itself suggested that there be a Division by Houses which indicates that they are, despite their claims, determined to keep confession out of the service. On a Division the Bishops and Clergy voted again confession whilst the Laity voted in favour.

John Cook proposed a motion regarding the place of the giving of the Bible. A few years ago the practice began of allowing the Bible to be given at the end of the service, apparently to symbolise the giving of authority to preach. However, the knock on effect of this is that it can be done alongside the handing over of a chalice and patten. This latter identification is undoubtedly desired by Anglo-catholics. Again the Synod had agreed to this change in February but the Revision Committee refused to accept it. There was, once again, a call of a Division by Houses and the Synod rejected the change in all three houses with about 40% of the laity voting in favour.

There were two amendments to do with the title of the service. In the Book of Common Prayer the service is called 'Ordination OR Consecration' which ties in with the unwillingness of the BCP to identify Bishops as a third order. David Banting proposed reversion to the BCP title but this was strongly resisted again by the Revision Committee who are unwilling to admit the possibility that Bishops might not be a separate order. These two motions did not gain enough support to continue debate.

There appears to be strong feelings from a number of Synod members that they will vote against the Final Approval of the Ordinal on Monday.

The Evening business was Questions.

In answer to one question the Bishop of Peterborough stated that the House of Bishops Pastoral Statement on the forthcoming Civil Partnerships provision will be released within the next few weeks. There were questions from clergy who implied that they would seek to enter into Civil Partnerships when available.

One fact that came to light, if I understand correctly, is that in 2003 the Church of England as a whole spent around £474million on the upkeep of 16,196 churches.

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