

General Synod Report Monday at York University

Date : 11 July 2005

Late last night (beginning at 10.15pm) the two Convocations (York and Canterbury), and the House of Laity had separate meetings at which the Bishops explained the last minute changes they had made to the ordination services in an attempt to head off a revolt. The changes were endorsed by the three meetings, and it seems likely that the services will not be authorised.

Synod spent the morning largely on financial business. First was a report entitled 'Accountability and Transparency'. This had been prepared by a Group set up by the Archbishops to look into the issue. Many people, including myself, did not even know there was a group whose role was to look at transparency.

Second was a report entitled resourcing mission. The main plank of this is that the Church Commissioners funds not spent on pensions should be used to fund mission. This would mean a change from the present system whereby money is given to Dioceses using some elaborate formula. It would also mean a cut in funding to Cathedrals. At this stage there were no solid proposals.

Third was the Strategic Spending Review. It was pointed out that giving within congregations has increased significantly in recent years yet still average giving is only about 3% of personal income as against the 5% which the Church of England has spoken about for years.

One of the concepts running through these various reports is that of 'mutual solidarity'. There appears to be a shift away from parishes putting money into a central pot from which money is paid out. However, they do not wish to make parishes responsible for deciding how their giving should be used, so some different form of centralised funding, through Dioceses appears to be in view.

After the various financial items the Synod considered the national Church budget for 2006. There was nothing dramatic in this although it was noted that some saving had been made against training costs because fewer people were being trained by Theological colleges and more by courses. The various budget votes were unanimous.

The Synod then had a third shot at changes to Standing Orders but was again unable to complete this business.

The afternoon saw nearly four hours of debate on the Consecration of Women as Bishops. There were two amendments which were intended to delay the process and both of these failed.

A further amendment intended to ensure that proper account was made of the problems the legislation will make for opponents was passed by a narrow margin. The debate was good natured, in fact quite subdued and given the split of opinions in Synod was representative, except that only one evangelical opposed was called to speak and that was me.

Synod has completed the debate on the Ordination of Women. The voting was as follows

	For	Against
House of Bishops :	41	6
House of Clergy :	167	46
House of Laity :	159	75

The resolution was thus passed and had this been a final approval vote then it would have been passed with more than 2/3rds majority in each house.

In the evening the Synod gave final approval to the Ordination Services. These have been debated several times already at this Synod due in part to the way in which resolutions passed in the February Synod were subsequently dealt with. A potential revolt which might have seen the services rejected at the final hurdle was headed off by some late minute changes introduced by the House of Bishops. The services are in many respects an improvement on the ASB ordinal. However, equally there are now more options, which some Bishops are likely to make liberal use of, that will enable the services to be used in a much less reformed way. The services were approved and will be used from September.

Final business of the day was consideration of the report of the Audit Committee which happens as a matter of course every three years.

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