

## General Synod Report Tuesday at Church House Westminster

Date : 15 November 2005

The new quinquennium of the General Synod opened today with the customary service at Westminster Abbey and the opening ceremony. The Queen, who opened the Synod and gave a brief address, appeared unsteady on her feet.

The Synod is now significantly smaller than when it last met with around 480 members. It is also unclear at this stage what the theological balance will be.

After the customary welcomes and progress on legislation Synod began with a debate on the report of the Business Committee.

The first substantial debate was a report entitled 'Facing the Challenge of Terrorism'. This featured a wide-ranging debate. The final resolution was passed by 257 votes to none. The resolution reads:

*That this Synod :*

- (a) condemn the 7 July terrorist atrocities, express its sympathy to the victims and families of all who suffered as a result of those and subsequent events, record its appreciation for the work of the emergency services and acknowledge the daunting responsibility of the Government, police and security services for safeguarding the lives of all our people in these times;*
- (b) nevertheless affirm that a successful counter-terrorism policy must, without excusing violence, understand and address its underlying causes;*
- (c) urge all political parties, in considering draft legislation to heed the clear warnings from history about the progressive erosion of fundamental rights in relation to habeas corpus, free speech and religious liberty; and*
- (d) call upon members of the Church of England to set an example in the promotion of greater understanding, reconciliation and respect within their local communities, especially where there are significant numbers from other faith traditions.*

However, an amendment was put by Gavin Oldham to modify section (b) to read, instead of 'without excusing violence', as 'whilst condemning violence'. The Synod apparently was unwilling to condemn violence and the amendment was defeated.

Final business of the day was a discussion (not a debate) on 'Episcopacy in the Church of England'. This was introduced by a panel of four – Geoffrey Rowell

(Bishop of Europe), Michael Nazir-Ali (Bishop of Rochester), Prof. Frances Young (Methodist invitee) and Prof Tony Thiselton. Each gave their own insights on episcopacy and touched on the implications of this for the possible consecration of women bishops. Tony Thiselton gave particular attention to Scripture. Frances Young stated that Methodists were willing to embrace episcopacy but that this must include full equality.

The general impression was that this was a useful exercise and there were a number of questions many of which inevitably focussed on women bishops.

The Synod now has its own signer for the deaf. Given the nature of some debates this must be quite a challenge. The Bishop of Rochester began one of his answers with the phrase 'pontifical commission declaration' and then asked how this would be signed – much to the mirth of the Synod. When the signer had completed the task the Synod applauded.

*This information is provided by Church Society for the benefit of users of the [www.churchsociety.org](http://www.churchsociety.org) and the EVnews mailing list.*

*We cannot guarantee the accuracy of all news items and any views expressed in the report are not necessarily those of the Society, unless actually stated to be so.*

*Other conditions are in accordance with the policies set out on [www.churchsociety.org](http://www.churchsociety.org).*