

## General Synod Report Wednesday at Church House Westminster

Date : 16 November 2005

Business on the second, and final, day of the Synod began with prayers followed by the Loyal Address to Her Majesty the Queen and a **Presidential Address** by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Archbishop, in a speech devoid of any Scripture, spoke about various matters, including the divisions that currently beset the Anglican Communion. One of his chief pieces of advice was that those who disagree should establish links in order to help our mutual understanding. This sounds fine and dandy but when the disagreement is over fundamental issues (like sexual conduct) how does it compare with the commands of God? In His Word God advocates separation from error, not trying to grow in mutual understanding. (eg. 1 Cor 5.9-11, Rev 2.20, 2 John 10, 2 Thes 3.6, Tit 3.10)

On the Consecration of Women Bishops Williams advocated again a structural provision for those who disagree with it. He described this approach as facilitating 'interactive pluralism'. The relevant section of the address is included at the bottom for reference.

First business was a debate on the **Draft Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure**. This Measure will do various things including making it much easier to reorganise Dioceses, close churches and start new mission initiatives. This legislation now passes to a Revision Committee and it appeared that many who spoke were angling to be appointed to it.

Synod members can make submissions, which the Committee has to consider. Others submission can be made but the Committee is under no obligation to consider them.

There followed a brief debate on new regulations concerning the **admission of baptised children to Holy Communion**. Guidelines had been introduced several years ago but aim is now to put these into regulations. This was passed with about 20 votes against. The matter will now be taken up by the House of Bishops.

The Bishop of Rochester asked whether the regulations would force child communion into becoming a normative practice. The response appears to have been that it will not make the practice normative since parishes can refuse to

adopt it. However, this appears to be contradicted by Section 10 of the regulations in which the expectation is that if a child has taken communion in one parish they can take it in all.

**The Churches Conservation Trust** looks after 335 churches which are of architectural or historic interest but are no longer used for public worship. Synod was asked to discuss payments to the Trust. By and large the feeling is that the Trust does a good job but that if the nation wishes these buildings to be preserved more financial assistance should be given. There was a suggestion that perhaps an hundred of the buildings could be disposed of.

The Trust makes considerable effort to ensure that the buildings are not just monuments but are used as much as possible for community purposes.

The cost of the CCT is around £12million for the 3 years from April 2006. 70% of this is met by the government with the remainder upto £1.3m per year being paid by the Church Commissioners. It was this that the Synod was asked to approve.

The Government used to pay 40% but this was increased to 70% as compensation when the Church suddenly had to pay Council tax on all clergy houses.

The afternoon began with a discussion of the Clergy Terms of Service – Property Issues report. This proposes that clergy houses be transferred from the benefice (ie. Owned by the Incumbent) to the Diocesan Patronage Board. An amendment which would have taken the guts out of the report was defeated but was so close that there had to be a count and then a division of the whole Synod. The final motion was passed but with sufficiently strong views against to suggest that the proposal could have a rough ride when legislation is finally brought.

Final business was question time with a remarkably small number of questions. Only a few were raised about Civil Partnerships which might have been expected to have been more prominent.

This brief Synod closed at around 6pm although there were hustings for some of the key elected posts to be voted on in the next few weeks.

*Report compiled by David Phillips with grateful thanks to Tim Cox.*

#### Excerpt from Rowan Williams' Presidential Address

Everyone knows the threats that face us, internally and internationally, over divisions in the Communion. We are painfully aware of the quarrels over sexuality, and the tensions and complications around how we handle the question of women's ordination as bishops. I suggest two considerations for us. The sexuality debate is infinitely complicated by high levels of mutual ignorance and anxiety between 'North' and 'South', and by perceptions, not always unfair, about the uncritical use of power and influence by older and wealthier churches. If every member of this Synod made a commitment to make contact with someone in another province who is not likely to share their view, we might at least move away from demeaning caricatures on both sides. Similarly, in regard to women bishops, I

suggest that we make some individual commitments. When my diocese in Wales was discussing women priests a decade ago, we arranged prayer partnerships between people on opposing sides, on the basis that we should need some ingrained habits of shared prayer and patience if we were going to carry on a common Christian life after a divisive vote. Are Synod members ready to undertake such a commitment and to commend it to the Church at large? And, in relation to the detail of the discussion on women bishops, let me simply say that I still passionately believe it is wholly worthwhile to seek for a structure that will allow what I have been calling 'interactive pluralism' in one or two recent lectures on politics – sorry about the jargon – that is, a situation in which difference is publicly acknowledged and given space, but not regarded as an excuse for 'ghettoisation' or exclusion from a serious degree of shared work, shared resources and mutual responsibility.

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