

General Synod Report Thursday at Church House Westminster

Date : 9 February 2006

The entire morning at General Synod today was taken up with a further debate on women bishops. The Archbishop of Canterbury introduced the motion on behalf of the House of Bishops. He reminded Synod that the theological exploration on women bishops has not yet been completed. He then spoke of the need to make structural provision for opponents, which is what the Guildford Report proposes. The motion will mean that between February and July further work will be done on theological, ecumenical and canonical implications of the proposals. This reflects the fact that the proposals in the report are fairly new and need to be thought through.

There were six amendments in all, three of which were significant changes to the main motion. All six were resisted by the Archbishop and rejected by the Synod although the actual voting was very different on some of them.

The first significant amendment was put by Robert Key MP, a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament. He asserted that the Committee considered that the main decision had been taken in 1992. His motion would have seen the main proposal in the Guildford Report abandoned. Instead of Transferred Episcopal Arrangements (TEA) as proposed by Guildford, would be a simple measure with a code of practice. It is widely recognised that this will really not provide any safety for opponents. The amendment was rejected by a substantial majority.

The third major amendment from Jeremy Crocker called for further work to be done on TEA and a simple measure in tandem so that the Synod can compare the two in July and make a decision between them. This had far more support. After debate the Synod voted by houses with a very unusual split of voting:

The House of Clergy voted for this amendment by 102 votes to 79 but the House of Bishops and the House of Laity both voted against (by 33 votes to 9 and 113 votes to 73 respectively).

Therefore the amendment was also lost.

The second major amendment was fairly confusing but appeared to be trying to make TEA stretch further.

When all six amendment has been rejected and after a total of three and a half hours, the Synod voted in favour of the main motion with just one vote against (although apparently 60 fewer people voting than in the earlier recorded vote).

Therefore further work will now be done on the proposals set out in the Guildford Report with a view to the Synod making a decision on what shape legislation should take at the July Synod. The decision in July will open the way for the legislative process to begin, although final approval on this is probably 3 or 4 years away.

The other two items of business for the day was a report on Church buildings entitled 'The Church's Built Heritage' and Questions which had been shunted to the end of the Synod. There were a few questions asked about Civil Partnerships but given the significance of these it was surprising that more was not said at the Synod.

The Group of Sessions prorogued at 5.30pm.

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