



Open Synod Group Newsletter January 2015

President : [The Rt Revd. Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover](#)

Chair: [Mrs Caroline Spencer, Canterbury](#)

Women Bishops: history is made

This "better way" by grace and trust and less law has seen the Consecration of Rev Libby Lane at York Minster. As we seek our mutual Flourishing we welcome too the consecration of Rev Phillip North.

**OSG Meeting Tuesday 10th Feb
in the Robert Runcie Room, Church House
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 10th, 7.15 for 7.30 pm
Guest speaker**

**Andreas Whittam Smith
First Estates Commissioner
'Money and the Church: a Short History'**

OSG Committee meeting:

Thursday Feb 12th at 7:45 for 8.00am in Room 2

Flourishing or Withering? Whither the C of E? Tim Hind writes;

As I write this the nomination of the Bishop of Stockport has just been announced and one could be beginning to think that many of the idiosyncrasies of the Church of England can become a thing of the past - the discrimination on gender grounds and other injustices might just be leaving for elsewhere.

It would be nice to think that but I fear that the enactment of new measures and even concrete evidence of their implementation still doesn't entirely change the culture of an organisation. If we look back over the last 20 years we will see many, sadly too many, examples of women being treated badly despite the fact that they had been legitimately ordained and installed. Even the Right Revd Libby Lane referred to the history of hurts in her early interviews.

We currently have a series of guidelines issued by the House of Bishops some years ago and undergoing review through facilitated conversations on who is permitted to exercise their ministry within our Church. They permit members of the LGBTI community to exercise all levels of priestly ministry so long as they are celibate.

Now whether you agree or disagree with this stance and for whatever reason - either you don't think there should be a bar or you don't think they should be allowed whether celibate or not - it is noticeable that none of the celibate LGBTI community are currently openly members of the House of Bishops.

It is also noticeable that there is significant underrepresentation of members of the BME community in said House.

I am of the view that now would be an opportune time to begin a serious dialogue about how genuine we are about inclusivity.

First, I would like to ask whether we are more concerned about what people do than what they are. You can't criticise someone for being female or black because that is what they are. But some make judgments about the ability of people who are gay! They are described as if they have a condition or have made a lifestyle choice.

So the question arises as to whether 'gay' is 'what people are' or is it 'what they do'. Jesus came to us and said that all the things we were told were wrong to do are still wrong but he added that even thinking about doing them wasn't right either. This adds complexity to the question above. If 'gay' is 'what people do' then it also becomes 'what people think of doing'. Hence, the 'being celibate' bit doesn't act as a sensible qualification.

To me this exposes the hypocrisy of the current guidelines.

We have spent twenty years sorting out the messiness of the legalities of women's ministry and still haven't addressed fully the changes in culture that will enable women to be accepted by all members of our church as priests and bishops. We cannot afford to spend even half that time coming to a conclusion regarding our acceptance of LGBTI priestly ministry, allowing them to flourish as members of our church and treating them for what they are - loved by God.

Tim Hind

General Synod Agenda Feb 2015

In three short days Synod is expected to give approval and support to a series of proposals from the Task Groups; a series that mark some energy for change, radical new thinking and ruffling of feathers. Four seem to be strongly linked;

1. Discerning and Nurturing Senior Leaders (GS 1982). This is the Green report that creates a top talent pool for senior posts funded by central church resources. It reads like an "ideal corporate management and leadership development and succession plan"; but quite how it fits a church is more difficult to discern. The Faith and Order Commission paper does present some theological themes for consideration.

2. Resourcing the Future (GS 1978). Resourcing the Future (GS 1978) proposes that the Darlow formula is outdated. And we should stop subsidising failure; (somewhat harsh words these). Now a new strategy for distributing resources to dioceses, relating to strategic plans for growth with a strong bias towards the poor. These resources are roughly 5% of total diocesan expenditure

3. Resourcing Ministerial Education (GS 1979). Seeks collaborative leadership in mission, adapting to a rapidly changing context; ordinands who are younger, more diverse and with a wider range of gifts; an increase of at least 50% in ordinations on 2013 figures; development of lay ministries. Requests a radical restructuring of the funding of ministerial training, with proactive initiatives being taken to attract younger candidates. A bit of ageism enters with a view that candidates of 50 and over will be selected and funded by each diocese.

4. Church Commissioners' Funds and Inter-Generational Equity (GS 1981).

This report calls for the Church Commissioners to release funds to support the developments outlined above.

The next three are parallel outworkings of common themes

Discipleship (GS 1977). This report presents "Ten marks of a diocese committed to developing disciples"; these include:

- Affirmation of lifelong journeys of discipleship and growth in Christian daily life;
- Celebration of the discipleship of all the baptised;
- Equipping disciples to help others to become followers of Jesus;
- All the baptised are called into God's service;
- Gifts of leadership recognised and developed;
- Encourage innovation;
- Dioceses to promote discipleship development with committed resources.

Parochial ministers might be a little surprised by an idea that encouragement to discipleship is lacking. And Manchester (leading as ever) Diocese appointed a Lay Discipleship Officer some twenty years ago.

Simplification (GS 1980). A call for simpler processes for mission, pastoral reorganisation and diocesan/parochial management", which might have more difficulties in implementation that can be foreseen.

Mission and Growth in Rural Multi-Parish Benefices (GS 1985). This report notes a problem of the needs of clergy and lay people in rural areas and seeks to establish an agenda for action.

Synodical Processes are being very compressed in these sessions (driven by a sense of urgency perhaps). Whether these proposals will have the proper level of scrutiny is not at all clear. Neither is it clear whether GS will be expected to have any further role in approving and new arrangements or funding decisions. Some quite complex issues of accountability are being raised. The whole process requires some trust; but it would be a pity if trust between the council and the Synod was less mutual and becoming asymmetric.

Reflection across two decades: Tony Berry writes;

Twenty years ago GS was presented with the report; "Working as One Body", which had a corporatist and centralising agenda; gathering GS Business management, church commission, pensions and finance into a new largely appointed National council, and removing the right of GS member to introduce legislation. In the event the Archbishops Council was created as it now is, largely elected and in some ways accountable with GS having its Business Committee and legislative powers (and The Women Bishops measure is testament to them).I wrote then;

A response to anxiety?

Under the stress of the issues explored (in the report) the Church had considerable anxieties about, the perceived relevance of its witness (the belief question); and its capacity to continue its work (the resource question); to maintain its unity (the two integrities question); to remain as a national institution (the establishment question); to maintain its confidence (the reversal of decline question); to present a centre of potency (the powerlessness question);

The proposals produced a structural solution of centralisation and control (absorbing parts into a new unaccountable corporate body) which may be interpreted as a defence against these anxieties wherein the organisation was invited to regress from its institutional pluralism to a traditional mode of executive and (arch)episcopal authority as it sought to separate the executive decision making from the legislature of general synod and to rest the charism only in the House of Bishops. The purpose and rationale of this move was so that the Church organisation might be seen as coherent in policy, united and dependable and a proper object for dependence and would be perceived to have clarity of purpose and focus, manage resources centrally and have the capacity to pursue its work. But it may be that the millennial old institution unfettered by the synodical outcome of the 19th and 20th century conciliar movement was reasserting itself and rejecting what might be viewed as a transplanted organism from enlightenment thought onto a deeply traditional institution.

It seems that the anxieties have not been allayed and in some ways the executive control model has been reawakened. The next few years might challenge our notions of inclusion.

Almighty Father

Give us grace and strength this day to build up your church in love for the world

In the making of disciples and to equip the saints for the work of ministry

Plant your hope deep within us

Open our eyes to a fresh vision of your kingdom.

Give us wisdom for the common task.

Draw us and all your Church deeper into Christ our foundation and cornerstone,

That we may work together as one body in the power of the Spirit

And for the sake of your glory. Amen

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