

# **REPORT FROM GENERAL SYNOD – NOVEMBER 2012**

## **Monday 19<sup>th</sup>**

Whichever way the vote on Tuesday was going to go, I knew that this report was going to be one of the hardest to write. I will endeavour to impart the facts of the event but I will undoubtedly colour this with the emotional air of the event as well. I always try to be impartial and if that slips I ask for forgiveness in advance.

On Monday the report from the Business Committee and the presentation on the Anglican Consultative Council went well and we had a memorable completion of all the Questions (a first for a long, long time).

The only debate that was likely to engender any controversy was that on the report back from the Dioceses on the Article 8 reference concerning the Anglican Covenant. The full explanation of how it failed to obtain consent will not really emerge until we reflect on the whole process next year and are able to debate the following motions that whilst recognising that the Covenant was not right (yet!) there is an enormous desire to engage with the Anglican Communion.

Once again it appeared that those who manage the worship during synod had come up with some imaginative words and music. I was particularly moved by the singing of "God to enfold you".

The one thing that was missing generally on Monday was any real sparkle. There were some uncharacteristic exchanges which I put down to people doing whatever they always do but in way holding their emotions together too tightly. Definitely an air of anticipation.

On irritation for me had been on the journey up. I had parked at Templecombe and was told shortly after I had bought my ticket that the signals were down between Yeovil and Tisbury. I had to drive to Salisbury and was fortunate to catch a train from there which delivered me to Waterloo on time. Nevertheless, my day had had an awkward start.

## **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>**

We started the day well with Eucharist and some very apposite words from Archbishop Rowan. We also had an amusing slip from Archbishop Sentamu when by mistake he announced that the day was the 650<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary for the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

One person said to me on Monday that they were running a book on when someone would say something new.

Although we debated for about 8 hours, not much new came through. I found the contributions from the current and designate Archbishops of Canterbury very valuable indeed. They gave a strong lead and together with other bishops who spoke (excluding Chichester, Burnley, Chester and Europe) attempted to give great assurance to those who were opposed to the legislation that they would make sure that the legislation and its associated Code of Practice would be adhered to.

I was impressed by the contributions from the Bishops of Liverpool and of Dorchester. Bishop James Jones spoke of his journey into a better understanding of what headship meant and his realisation that it did not mean subservience of women. There were some very emotional speeches from men and women talking about their support for legislation which was on the edge of the position they would favour and the sacrifice that they had made to get to that point.

The contribution from the Bishop of Manchester throughout the whole legislative process has been immense and in other denominations immediate sainthood would be called for.

The Chair of the House of Laity attempted to be even-handed in his introduction while still wishing to make clear his personal stance which was opposed to the legislation. He was visibly shocked the following day to find that many members of the Laity were upset by his speech.

At lunchtime the mood of Synod was balanced. However, after lunch and with so many people wishing to speak the time limit was successively reduced to 30 seconds (from its 5 minute starting point). The end flurry appeared to be a greater number of opposing voices with a drip, drip mantra of "there is a better way". By the end the mood had shifted.

The voting by houses was received in silence. The results were

	For	Against	Abstentions	Carried
Bishops	44	3	2	94%
Clergy	148	45		77%
Laity	132	74	0	64%
Overall	324	122	2	73%

Synod was in shock following the result which also meant that the rest of the planned business for the day was not taken.

The closing worship was identical to the previous day and yet the beautiful chant had a minor key sound to it.

## **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>**

Wednesday was difficult. We had three good debates on the day. First, there was a debate around allowing all who can partake in communion to be able to administer and for such license to be given by the parish priest (subject to episcopal permission). Then we had a good debate on encouraging Church of England institutions to pay a living wage. Our final major debate was on the matter of Youth Unemployment and how through our structures and processes we can enable training and support for those who are disadvantaged and marginalised.

However, there were two other motions and some events which are also in need of mention.

Due to our meeting this November it was being strongly suggested that with Christmas and the New Year coming shortly there was insufficient time to build a suitable agenda for meeting in February. The Archbishop of Canterbury also

suggested that with emotions running the way they were it was probably too early to come together especially in the same place as this week. It was agreed, after passionate speeches both sides, that we would be better off not meeting until York in July.

Members were assured that when the House of Bishops meet in December they will be looking to discuss the options that are available for proceeding with the legislation. The Archbishops' Council will also be meeting in late November and matters would be assessed at that meeting. There would almost certainly be opportunities within Diocese and Deaneries for discussions to take place so that strengths of opinion regarding possible options could be gauged.

We needed to say farewell to a number of key servants of Synod and the Church.

We said farewell to great servants of Synod from the Church House Staff in Judith Gracias who had seen the Queen opening 8 out of 9 Synods and Colin Podmore who has served in CCU and as Clerk to the Synod amongst other distinguished roles. We will miss them both.

We also said farewell to the Bishops of Manchester and Bath & Wells. Bizarrely it was the previous motion on whether we held a Synod in February that meant that Peter, Bath & Wells was now attending his last General Synod. Just as he was beginning to enjoy it, as well!!!

The farewell to the Archbishop of Canterbury was as is the custom done in the form of a motion.

The Archbishop of York, the Prolocutor of Canterbury, the Chair of the House of Laity and the spokesperson (almost shop steward in Archimandrite Ephrem Lash's case) for the Ecumenical Representatives all made their contribution in eulogistic terms.

A genuine warmth came from the Synod as they gave a prolonged standing ovation to ++Rowans clear discomfort. It is a measure of the man that he was immensely humble all through the proceedings.

Two final things.

In September, my wife and I had Solar Panels fitted. On 21<sup>st</sup> November they generated no electricity. A sign?

However, during the afternoon of 22<sup>nd</sup> there were further torrential storms in Somerset. As a result, Templecombe station was reported as flooded. By the grace of God my car was in Salisbury!

**Tim Hind**

**Bath & Wells**