

## General Synod, Westminster, November 2014

### Monday 17th

So the Synod was to meet for the final steps in the biggest change to its ministry provision for over 20 years. It was an immense privilege to be one of the signatories to the Instrument of Enactment of the Amending Canon No 33 which finally put into law the right for the Church of England to have bishops of either gender. It needs to be recognised that other provinces have signed things into law before us. It also needs to be remembered that some (e.g. Scotland & Wales) have yet to consecrate any women as yet.

The final choreography was very interesting. The Synod Office had prepared things to ensure that when the time came there were suitable photo opportunities as the Archbishops and other officers signed the Instrument. Many of those still opposed seemed to have foregathered in a single section of the chamber so that when the vote was taken there was a densely populated forest of hands in that section when "Noes" were asked to show. It is always true that the C of E can put on a good show.

Before the crucial debate, we had the usual introductions, progress of previous legislation and the debate on the Agenda. During this debate we had one forceful suggestion that it was good that we were about to vote on Women Bishops but it needed to be pointed out that there were already some good men who were still being denied the opportunity for preferment because they were gay even though they were being faithful to the House of Bishops requirement for celibacy.

It must also be noted that there is still an issue regarding the lack of senior clergy from the Black Minority Ethnic communities.

Having said all that the vote on Amending Canon No 33 was carried by a very large majority and, noting the mood of the discussion that have taken place over the last few days, I am convinced that we will see a woman as a bishop within the Church of England within a very short space of time.

After a journey around the Anglican Communion, thinly disguised as a Presidential Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he stated quite forcefully his condemnation of the persecution of Christians and other minority faith groups, we had a diet of Legislative business relating to Care of Churches, Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Ecclesiastical Property followed by some morsels which included the scheme for bringing the Diocese in Europe into line with the "mainland" dioceses. This latter was presented by the new Diocesan Bishop, Robert Innes, who said he wasn't sure if he had broken any records by making his maiden speech from the platform on his first day at Synod!

The rest of the day was taken up with a very good debate on the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy and the usual Question Time. Many synod members had noticed that the Lord Stephen Green report into talent management for senior appointments had started to bring about some changes and because they hadn't been involved began to ask searching questions about when this report could be made more publicly accessible.

## Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup>

Yesterday needed to be followed with something fairly spectacular to enable Synod to feel that the two days of sessions were justified.

At a fringe meeting on the previous evening I was briefed by Christian Aid on the different aspect of the troubles in Iraq and Syria. This was a very good introduction to some of the difficulties into how a Christian organisation can deal in areas of conflict where christians are being persecuted.

After Holy Communion the rest of the morning was devoted to a panel discussion on the subject of Violence against Religious Minorities in Iraq and Syria. The panel, ably chaired by the Bishop of Coventry, consisted of the Bishop of Leeds, HG Bishop Angaelos (Coptic Orthodox), Revd Rachel Carnegie (Anglican Alliance) and Shaykh Fuad Nahdi (Radical Middle Way). The debate was far ranging and gave great insight into the issues facing religious minorities. One quotation from the imam in particular summed up the difficulties for me. He said that it is written in the Koran that "there is no compulsion in religion" and hence anyone who prevents someone from believing differently cannot use their Islamic faith as a reason.

After a brief debate, which had to be adjourned, we agreed to move the measure relating to the way in which Dioceses are named to the next stage. The debate will resume at a later date.

The afternoon was taken up with a good debate on the Anglican Methodist Covenant which can begin to get some traction now that some of the obstacles gone away. This debate was followed by a splendid debate on the iniquities of the Spare Room Subsidy (Bedroom Tax) where we asked the Mission and Public Affairs Council to evaluate findings of research into the effects of the removal of the subsidy and to work with HMG and others on accessible housing for vulnerable people.

We have met every November for the last 3 years with each one being crucial to getting us to where we are today. In February we get a day off for good behaviour but my feeling is that the reduction to 3 days will mean that those 3 days will be very intense. We have a number of key things that need to be done before we start the new quinquennium next November and so there is a lot of work to be done.

**Tim Hind**

**Bath & Wells**