

Response to the First Report of The Archbishops' Council from Church Society

We welcome the attention being given to the vision for the national Church in its central structures and encourage you in your work. Having discussed the details of the First Report we offer the following observations.

There is a constant need to ensure that the central structures of the Church **serve the mission** of the Church both locally and nationally. The Council has taken a wise decision to look at the way in which potential areas of work can be prioritized. We welcome the way in which the Council is endeavouring to keep its work spiritually focused.

The most serious problem facing the nation and the national Church is **spiritual decline**. Without true spiritual revival the Church of England will continue to lose spiritual vitality and to grow numerically smaller. It is, in part, the recognition of the seriousness of this situation that prompted the establishment of the Archbishops' Council. The danger inherent in such a body is the temptation to believe that solutions can be found in structures, management, organization or policies. We encourage the Council to be constantly aware of the pressure to tackle issues in this way.

Whilst recognising that the First Report is necessarily brief we were disappointed by apparent **lack of a scriptural foundation**. We are fearful that this represents a failure to recognise the root of the problem facing us as a Church.

Without real spiritual revival the future of the Church of England is bleak. Our human response to this must be to cry out to God and at the same time take heed to the voice of God in scripture. We do not propose anything new, indeed it would be suspicious if we did.

The urgent need of the Church of England is to set forward a **biblical message** to individuals, to the Church and to the nation. This means: Declaring uncompromisingly the nature and character of God as He has revealed Himself to us. Recognising that the wrath of God is being revealed against human wickedness. Commanding people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel, trusting in Christ alone. Calling Christians to walk in step with the Spirit, living by biblical standards in private and public.

Making known God's wisdom to God's world.

We are bold to say that the present priority for the Church of England must not be on management or organization but on a return to a clear biblical gospel.

We encourage the members of the Archbishops' Council both individually and corporately to be courageous in upholding such biblical truth which is also our rich heritage in the historic formularies of the Church of England.

The Priorities

In tune with the nature of the First Report we offer some brief comments on the specific priorities in the Report. These should be read in the light of our overall comments. If the Church were being faithful to God's word revealed in scripture many of these things would largely take care of themselves!

A & B - Achieving the vision of a united Church

Without a common understanding of the gospel there can never be true unity. Focus on institutional unity and institutional churches is a constant drain. It is far better to seek to encourage shared faith and ministry a local level.

C & D - Spirituality, worship and discipleship.

'Spirituality' is a buzz word which is easily misunderstood. The Christian life, life in the Spirit, should be concerned with living out the will of God made known in the scriptures.

A to D are not priorities . They will follow from spiritual vitality and do not benefit greatly from too much steering or interference at a national level!

E - Building mission

This should be top of the list of priorities. Though the mainstay of mission is the local Church, encouraging this and plugging the gaps where it fails must be the function of the wider Christian community.

Church planting should be encouraged and Church growth should not be stifled by narrow party churchmanship.

F - Education

High priority. The involvement in education is a great strength and should

be a clear priority both locally and nationally.

G & H - Outward looking.

Both these are areas where again there is much to be said and done nationally. However, unless the Church bases its response on clear biblical teaching then its voice will weaken both the gospel and the nation. This is all too apparent in areas such as sexuality.

I, J, K & L - Supporting, promoting and extending

It is in these areas that there is much potential for harm. The Council must continue to recognise the natural tendency of organizations to draw functions and power to the centre, especially at times of trouble and decline. This has happened at both Diocesan and national level to the detriment of the Church. In order to keep the parishes preeminent positive moves must be taken to protect and promote them. Recent Measures have also added to the administrative burden on Bishops hindering them in their work.

The decline in numbers of clergy and church members has been followed by the merger of many parishes. There is now a great need to combine Dioceses. Reducing the number by at least 20% would produce great savings in overheads and free up many more people for parish based ministry. The present cost of Diocesan structures and personnel cannot be justified. Cutting 10 or more Dioceses should have knock on savings with bodies such as the General Synod.

We encourage you to be courageous in your vision for the Church. National structures should be kept to a minimum. Local churches should be strengthened and facilitated in their task of proclaiming the gospel and building up the body of Christ.