

## General Synod Report

Date : 13 November 2002 (Wednesday)

Source : EVNEWS Item

The first two items of the day were the authorisation of Series 1 Marriage and Burial. These services are now an anomaly. Their origin lies in the 1928 Prayer Book revision and they only just survived in the 1960s when they were introduced as virtually the first liturgy under the Worship and Doctrine Measure. After the long process of Common Worship revision it seems bizarre that they should be retained. However, in the case of the Marriage service only three of us voted against.

The Series 1 Burial service is more problematic. Though they are modest by comparison to some there are prayers in this service that involve intercession for the departed. Funerals are an important time, when it is essential that we do not confuse people but present them with the clear and simple message that right now counts for ever - our eternal destiny depends on our response to Christ. Anything in the funeral service that clouds this or confuses people should be avoided. Despite the spin that various speakers attempted to put on the service it does not satisfy this criteria of setting out plainly and simply the claims of Christ and the absolute necessity of saving faith in Him for eternal salvation. In the end the service was accepted with only about 40 people voting against. These two services will go back to the house of Bishops and then come to Synod for Final Approval in February or July. After that they will be authorised until they are rescinded by the Synod.

Next followed the motion from Southwell Diocese on the vesture of clergy. The Southwell motion called for a revision of Canon B8 to loosen it so that a minister and PCC may decide together that at certain occasions the minister need not wear the full regalia but can take a service in more appropriate clothing. It is the case that the canon is now widely breached particularly, but by no means exclusively by evangelical churches. It should also be remembered that in the mid 19th Century Anglo Catholics began to breach the then canons about vesture and that not until over a hundred years later did canon law catch up. It seems peculiar that the clergy today should be required at all services to wear clothing that many centuries ago was the clothing worn by all. In the event the Synod voted by houses with the result that the motion was lost. As always the Bishops were completely out of step with the laity and the Clergy were neither one nor the other. The Bishops voted resoundingly against the change, the clergy by just less than two thirds, whilst the laity actually voted for the change. Hopefully this will not lead to zealous

Bishops using the new Clergy Discipline Measure (which goes before Parliament in December) to cause trouble for evangelical churches.

The first business of the afternoon was the report Presence and Prophecy. This is a report on the mission of the Church in the modern world. It is particularly concerned with ensuring that mission is the focus of theological education and that it drives the curriculum. The report is a bit like apple pie - not something one can vote against. However, there was considerable disquiet from a whole range of people about aspects of the course. The report was supposedly ecumenical but various people hadn't been consulted. Some saw its assumptions about educational methods as outdated. Theological colleges apparently saw many parts as ill conceived, and so on. In the end the report was adopted.

Then came a Private Members Motion from Barry Barnes. This was a modest call to the government to bring about changes in the Abortion Act. The speech that Barry gave and most of the other speeches given were very forceful and showed the strength of feeling within the Synod on the issue. The motion however faced up to the reality of the present situation where the vast majority want unrestricted access to baby-killing facilities. It is hoped that a revision of the Act will cut down on the horror of abortion, but in the end legislation alone will never bring about the changes required. The vote in the end went 220-20. However, there must therefore have been at least 100, possibly more in the Synod who abstained.

The final business of the day was Parliamentary Democracy. I am afraid that I exercised my democratic right to leave (I had a Cub pack to lead!)

*David Phillips*  
*General Secretary, Church Society*