General Synod Report

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With an afternoon devoted to sex it was intriguing that in many respects the most contentious part of the business at today's General Synod was the first item on the future use of the Church Commissioners' funds.

This was an unusual exercise. The Commissioners are formally answerable to Parliament and therefore this debate was part of the consultation exercise by the Commissioners regarding its proposals.
The Commissioners are proposing to fund directly some of the mission initiatives outlined in Mission-shaped Church. To achieve this they are wanting to transfer some of their current responsibilities to do with Bishops and Cathedrals to Dioceses. This will have the knock-on effect of making the Bishops and Cathedrals more accountable to. There is a lot of hostility to the proposals from many of the vested interests.
The Church Commissioners provide a total of £160m per year to the Dioceses although only a small fraction of this is under consideration in this review.

Following a lot of passion regarding the possible removal of funding to Cathedrals and Bishops the Synod voted to adjourn the debate on the Commissioners' Funds. The idea appearing to be that there will be opportunity for vested interests to twist arms.

Next in the day was the Doctrine Commission report 'Being Human'. This is a helpful resource looking at a range of issues to do with being human today but as with the later report on sexuality its handling of scripture is incompatible with the Anglican formularies and therefore the reports opens the way to erroneous conclusions. Synod took note of 'Being Human' but there was no substantive motion.

In the afternoon with a fairly full house and gallery the Synod began debate on 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality'. This report from a sub-group of the House of Bishops aims to give a guide to the debate on homosexuality. This appears to be part of the strategy to

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keep discussion of this issue until the church changes its position. An analysis of the report is available from the Church Society website.

The Bishop of Oxford gave a good summary of the report and stated that it attempts to set out all the different views within the church and to critique it. The take note motion went through without opposition and three amendments that would have skewed this in a pro-homosexual conduct direction were rejected.
The substantive motion making the report available as a resource for debate was passed.

There was a brief foray into some wide ranging changes to the Synod's own standing orders but they are otherwise unworthy of note.

In the late afternoon the Synod voted on a York Diocesan Synod motion on 'cohabitation'. Whether deliberately or not this motion is badly worded and if it goes through will be understood by people at large as an acceptance of sex outside marriage. On behalf of the Mission and Public Affairs Committee the Bishop of Southwark moved an amendment which spelt out what the motion was trying to achieve whilst affirming marriage.

There is a good amendment from the Bishop of Southwark (on behalf of the Mission and Public Affairs Committee) that raises the concern behind the motion whilst affirming marriage and not appearing to endorse immorality. Two further amendments that would have made strong statements about the importance and centrality of marriage were rejected ostensibly on the basis that this distracted from the original focus of the York motion, that is social justice. However, it is clear that there are many on the Synod who do not want to do anything to support the exclusivity of marriage.

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