

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SCOTLAND

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Writer to the Signet

A first look at the agenda and papers for the Synod fired the prospective attendee with little enthusiasm. Synods are apt to rubber stamp decisions already taken by smaller and more expert bodies, to re-argue well-worn themes incapable of consensual resolution, and from time to time to pontificate on world issues and pass a resounding resolution to which the world pays no attention. Then, more practically, they revert to considering the annual menu of canonical changes, some minor, others more revolutionary, which come up for first or second reading.

It can be safely assumed that the year's accounts will be approved and the following year's budget sanctioned. An exhortation to increased giving can be expected, and Mission, an activity as much to be commended as sin is to be deplored, will be for debate. This year the appointment of a Mission Development Officer was approved, and ways considered for maximising the use of full- and part-time clergy. Rural Scotland was the subject of a report by the Rural Commission, which led to discussion about the problem of small congregations, the use of buildings often listed and expensive to maintain, and the possibility of rural partnerships with other denominations. The bishops were invited to authorise a limited number of areas of experiment and to encourage ecumenical co-operation in rural areas. Sympathy was expressed for isolated clergy serving in remote places who felt far from sources of support.

It was no surprise that indignation was voiced about aspects of the Asylum and Immigration Bill before Parliament and equally unsurprising was the volte-face about investing in South Africa. With the end of apartheid and the country's need of foreign currency to repair the economy and create employment, investment in that country was to be actively encouraged.

A stimulating debate took place about gender-specific language in the liturgy. Supporters of change and of the status quo all held strong views. A decision was quietly postponed for a year by remitting the recommendations for 'tidying-up' the imbalances of gender-specific terms to dioceses for their advice. In particular, the aspects on which change had been proposed were the predominant use of the image of God as father, the tendency to use male pronouns for the Holy Spirit, and the use of the term 'mankind' in reference to humanity.

Less contentious was the proposal for the addition of revised eucharistic prayers to the text of the Scottish Liturgy 1982. A number of written comments had been received before the Synod met, but the motion for approval was happily passed. Requests for the reprinting of the entire 1929 Prayer Book, a totally uneconomic project, were heard, which indicated that not all worshippers are happy with the recent editions of the Liturgy and the many variations now sanctioned.

A Declaration of Intent between the Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church in Scotland to work for closer co-operation was passed, thereby foreshadowing a similar intent in England. Such an ecumenical step is no longer controversial.

A more lively difference of view was revealed on Christian Initiation, with motions and amendments being put forward. An unsatisfactory position has arisen as a result of some churches admitting young people to communion before they have been confirmed. Confirmation in such cases has ceased to be a sacramental initiation ceremony in which an act of obedience is required before the candidate is qualified to receive communion. The proponents believe that baptism

with the promises made by the godparents on the child's behalf give full membership of the Church. The matter was remitted to the Liturgy Committee to 'continue its work towards a new Initiation Rite', with the help of a study of the baptism services of the partners in the Multilateral Conversations and of the Roman Catholic Church.

The second evening's agenda was the discussion of canonical changes—the reading and, with the requisite majorities, the passing of a number of alterations for the second time, and the consideration of others for the first time, when a bare majority is sufficient to carry the amendments forward. Those changes for the second time dealt with the promulgation of alterations of canons and the precise wording of liturgical texts which had been approved.

More emotive were the matters up for the first time. Indignation last year over proposal by the bishops to absorb the Diocese of Brechin into its neighbouring dioceses on the retiral of its bishop led to a proposal that the relevant canon be altered so that such restructuring should in future be within the competence of Synod rather than of the bishops in Episcopal Synod. Such change was approved.

Less straightforward were the proposed changes to Canon IV on the election of bishops. This canon has been under constant review, and each election of a bishop brings to light further areas of dissatisfaction. The electors may number about a hundred in the bigger dioceses, and the question arises how best they can choose between the competing qualities of the candidates, who in the last election numbered nine. Should the candidates be asked to appear before the body for interview? Should they be subjected to a written questionnaire as to their beliefs and opinions in an unlimited interrogatory? Should a candidate be suddenly put up at the last minute when the electors appear to be equally divided about the original candidates? The proposed changes are intended to deal with such matters. Unresolved, and probably incapable of resolution, is the more fundamental issue of the Provincial influence in the selection process. While the choice of a bishop is of great importance to the Province, especially with such a small bench of bishops, each diocese is very jealous of its right to make its own selection. Everyone wishes to avoid the unfortunate situation which arose in one Glasgow election—an episode which is fully recorded in a book, *The Scottish Episcopal Church in the Twentieth Century*, by Bishop Edward Luscombe, published contemporaneously with the Synod. Written by a former Primus of the Church, it is both authoritative and readable. Many of the attitudes of the Church are explicable only in the light of what has happened in recent years, a fact which makes the book most valuable.

The Synod was urged to look beyond the internal housekeeping and administrative problems which are inclined to be in the forefront of members' minds. This year the broader issues were much under consideration: liturgy, ecumenism, modernisation of ministry, and mission throughout Scotland. However, the more familiar parochialism burst through in a decision that in future no more than three out of four meetings should be held in Edinburgh.