

Talking not listening – General Synod November 2012

The first day of General Synod was the usual Agenda and we were really just marking time for the big debate the next day. Goodbyes to be made, report of the Business Committee, surprised that the Clerk to the Synod was leaving to take up a role as Director of Forward in Faith. The report from those who attended the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) visit to New Zealand, including a meeting with Bishop Victoria in Christchurch, made us all envious. The enthusiasm expressed by Rose Hudson-Wilkin was infectious to the point that we would all like to represent the ACC and be included in the next visit in 2015.

Tuesday morning we all shared Holy Communion. It was our last real stand together. Afterwards I sat back and looked around. Church House was full of real tension and anxiety. I chose to sit in a row among those in the laity that I had identified as being against the motion – I recognised our brothers and sisters from the previous evening when I attended the various fringe meetings. I could also tell by the folded arms. As a brief introduction to the debate, Archbishop Rowan spoke positively of how the gift of the Spirit teaches us and touches our hearts. We are renewed in Christ when 'Heart speaks to Heart' - will Synod look like Jesus Christ? If Christ enters the centre of what we are, that is what will be seen and heard. It was a beautiful plea but it went unheard. Christ did not enter the debate. The Archbishop of York wished the Supreme Governor of the Church of England (yes we do have a woman at the top!) and her husband a very happy 65th wedding anniversary. There had been 172 requests to speak, we would break for lunch and then reconvene and vote in Houses at around 6pm. So on with the show.

The Bishop of Manchester tried to persuade us that any imperfections in the legislation would still allow it 'to work' – for whom? A positive vote would enable the Church of England to flourish and those sitting next to me would have 'an honoured place'. My neighbour replied that this would happen over his dead body. Dr Williams spoke passionately in favour, quickly followed by his successor. Bishop Justin advised that we must not get into believing this is a 'zero sum game' (his commercial background is shining through) and the 'honoured place' syndrome repeated. Indeed most of the speeches referred to this – surely the only really honoured place will be in heaven?

The Chair of the House of Laity, Philip Giddings, chose not to speak for all of us but on his own negative ticket and, as this was directly after the Archbishop designate's very positive speech, it set the mood for the remainder of the available time. Those in favour did their best but the debate never really gained momentum. We ploughed on. As I wished to speak I stood up to be called at the end of every speech which provided good exercise and an opportunity to see the lie of the land. There were alternating speeches until we all felt drained. Reduced to sixty second speeches I did my best to exhort the positive. The Bishop of Bradford summed up that 'under God it is a moment of decision'. As is custom, the electronic voting and the announcement of the result were carried out in silence. Bishops and Clergy both had the two thirds required but we were six votes short in the House of Laity. There were smiles on many faces and tears from others. I will not be using the word 'respect' for a long time.

Sally Muggeridge