

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND 1989

Press Embargo : Tuesday 16 May 1989 at 12 Noon, Dublin

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate  
of All Ireland

Your Grace, my lords, members of the General Synod, distinguished  
visitors from other Christian denominations, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my privilege to welcome you to this second session of the  
fortieth General Synod of the Church of Ireland and to pray that  
Almighty God will bless and guide our work during the next few days.

Few sessions of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland will have  
met at a time of such change and debate in the life of the Anglican  
Communion. Few sessions will have met against a background of such  
movement and change in the world Church.

**LAMBETH CONFERENCE 1988:**

Last summer your bishops attended the Lambeth Conference at Canterbury.  
That experience made a significant and lasting impression. We wor-  
shipped and debated with fellow bishops from all over the world. We  
renewed friendships and made many new contacts. We listened to the  
experiences of those whose leadership and pastoral care is exercised,  
even as we meet here, in areas of extreme deprivation, hardship,  
violence directed against the Church and devastating human need. But  
we also learned of courage, faithfulness and vision. Above all we  
heard of personal evidence that the Church is growing in influence and  
deepening in experience of God's love and purpose. Thank God, we  
heard so much evidence of the renewal, the spiritual renewal, of the

Church. In this bond of sharing and learning we felt our own call to service and leadership being renewed. We returned to our tasks here in Ireland with a fresh sense of humility and privilege for the work to which God has called us.

Out of the Lambeth experience has come the call for a Decade of Evangelism. This call is to find new ways of reaching out as Anglicans into a world which is itself changing before our eyes. But the call that came from Lambeth '88 to each of our Provinces, was much more than an urging to tell the Christian story to the world. It was a call to re-vitalise the Anglican Communion, to re-vitalise the Church of Ireland.

The Decade of Evangelism will be the subject of prayer, discussion and planning by your bishops in the coming months.

#### LIVING WITH DIFFERENCE:

Throughout the history of Anglicanism the Church has lived with anomalies and difference. Such difference has not been confined to cultural or social backgrounds. There have been differences of approach to doctrine and worship. Divergence has led to debate and at times deep division in the Anglican Communion. The question of the limits to divergence which are possible within one family have been the concern of the Archbishop of Canterbury's International Commission of which I am privileged to be Chairman. This Commission, established at the request of the Lambeth Conference, has been asked to examine ways of guiding the 27 autonomous Provinces where deep differences of approach exist on the question of women in the Episcopate. We were not asked to adjudicate on the rights or wrongs of women bishops. What we are examining are ways of living with difference.

The election and consecration of a woman bishop in the United States of America has brought to the forefront questions on the nature of communion. Deep differences exist throughout the Anglican Communion on this issue. What does it mean to be 'in communion' with other

Provinces or Churches? Many see the question of women in the priesthood and episcopate as being of fundamental significance to their understanding of the nature of the Church and its God-given mission to the world. There are many Anglicans who welcome the extension and development of women's role in the ordained ministry. But I have to tell you that the experience of the Commission has shown that there are many who see other priorities for the Church at this time.

The pattern of relationships between Provinces within the Anglican Communion, and indeed the relationships between individuals within the Church, will depend on many considerations - not least the necessity to appreciate the sincerity of those who hold opposing views. Throughout history the people of God have faced differences, often of a fundamental doctrinal nature. The consequences of such differences have not always been negative or destructive. Some friction is a necessary condition for growth. The catch phrase of Anglicanism has been '**unity in diversity**'. The Lambeth Conference spoke of '**respect**' and '**courtesy**' on the part of those who differ.

#### **WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND:**

Later this week this major issue will cease to be for us here something that is happening 'out there'. You will be asked to consider a report from a committee set up in your name on women in the priesthood and episcopate of the Church of Ireland.

I am confident we will approach our consideration of this report prayerfully. Deep divisions and sadly, even bitterness, evident in other parts of the world have not been reflected in Ireland. There are many reasons for this. However differences of opinion do exist in our Church on this question. It is for the Synod to decide in a democratic manner what it perceives to be God's will for the Church of Ireland.



This question involves relationships between one part of the Anglican Communion and another. It involves relationships with other Churches. It involves relationships between clergy and between members of the laity. It involves the genuine and heartfelt feelings of women of faith who have a sincere sense of vocation. It involves our attitude to the Ministry. It concerns the future pattern of our Ministry. It confronts questions of vocation and women's place in the life of the Church. But it compels us to think deeply about what we think is the nature of the Church and God's purpose for it.

When the International Commission's first report is available to the public next week, you will find that in our study of the nature of communion we have advocated the observance of what is called '**an open process of reception**'. There are many ways to explain these words. Put simply they mean that the Church gives itself time to evaluate developments and to judge their acceptability to the people of God. This is not a process through which the Church dodges an issue. Far from it. It is a means of discerning God's will and purpose. It is a means of allowing the Spirit to guide the Councils or Synods of the Church into the way of truth. It is for the Church to decide when that process of reception has reached a stage when definitive decisions are desirable.

I would pay a warm tribute to those women who, ordained as deacons in the Church of Ireland, have given us such fresh insights into Ministry. I do not speak in any patronising way. They entered the Ministry of the Church of Ireland fully aware of the limits we had set on the exercise of that calling. Their acceptance of that situation has been so clearly seen in faithful ministry and pastoral care.

This is a time for honesty as we look out through the world of the Anglican Communion. Disagreement does exist. People of faith and conviction are making up their minds. It is a time for integrity as well as charity. But the life of faith goes on.

I am often reminded of the words of St. Cyprian:

**'The Church, while still preserving unity, will be obliged to live for a time with the fact of disagreement.'**

I would ask the Synod to approach its decision on this important question seeking only the will of God for the Church of Ireland at this time. Naturally you will be aware of the views being expressed on other parts of the world Church : you will also be aware of the consequences of any decision you make - for consequences there will be, whatever your decision. However, I would be failing the Synod and the Church if I did not underline what I believe to be your duty this week : for it is your opinion that matters here. You must weigh up what you read, what you have experienced of the life of the Church, what you believe about the Church - and then prayerfully seeking God's guidance, make your decision for the good of the Church of Ireland.

#### **NORTHERN IRELAND:**

Learning to 'live with differences' is clearly the main challenge for the Anglican Communion today. When this Synod turns to matters more local and perhaps more identifiable it is again confronted with the importance of that challenge.

The history of Ireland is in the main a story of living with differences. It is the story of two minorities. It is the story of religious and political differences among people destined to share an island which has its own cultural and economic strands to a tapestry that for far too long has been one of suffering, division and suspicion. That suffering and those divisions among people who find at times so much in common must yet again concern this General Synod.

Northern Ireland continues to be a place of contradictions.



Many yearn for peace and stability - but not all are prepared to take risks to achieve it. Many pray for peace and talk about it - not all are prepared to work for it. Many recognise grievances - not all are prepared to face up to the causes of grievance with honesty. Many talk about the importance of community progress - not everyone is prepared to face up to changes of attitude which will bring it about.

But there are other contradictions in Northern Ireland life for which we can be thankful.

Too often the world sees only media pictures of death and destruction, yet industry and commerce exhibit many hopeful signs. While commentators concentrate on division and alienation so many people are building their own bridges across the divide. While people in the outside world talk about a 'religious war' so much is happening in which the Churches can present a united front. As many continue to lean back on traditional negative attitudes we find among young people a real desire to be given the opportunity to build a future that will not depend on divisiveness. The tragedy for many young gifted people is that they are being denied that chance.

Living with difference, living with deep-rooted difference of attitude, living with deeply divided political aspirations - this is the main task facing Northern Ireland. In Church circles we talk about the 'highest degree of communion' possible between people who differ. In the social picture of Northern Ireland we face an almost identical problem.

The other morning I was asked by a child in one of our schools:

**'How will I know when the day comes that  
reconciliation has happened?'**

It is a sobering question. Reconciliation is the most misunderstood and mis-used word in the Irish vocabulary. It is a process - not a fact. It is a fragile process - and it is subject to many obstacles. But it remains the only hope for the people of this island.

During the past year there have been tentative attempts to encourage political dialogue between the parties. Contacts have been made in public and in private. After generations of stalemate we cannot expect early or dramatic developments. Dialogue is a tender plant. It needs care and encouragement. I believe the vast majority of people want to see dialogue take place. People are tired of what they perceive as excuses rather than reasons for avoiding dialogue. The hopes and expectations of people who have suffered so much have often been destroyed and disappointed. There is a degree of cynicism about the political process. The Church must remain in the forefront of those who encourage politicians to address the real issues that divide people. Dialogue will not end violence overnight. But both communities must increase their efforts to make the men of violence irrelevant to the solution of our problems.

The longer I work in Northern Ireland the more I am convinced that the main struggle is to win the hearts and minds of those who permit terrorism to continue. There are so many appeals made to the community as a whole to end violence. The truth of the matter is that it is a section of the community that needs to respond to those calls. There are so many who simply want freedom to live their lives free of fear.

Northern Ireland has for too long paid an unacceptable price for the consequences of violence, terrorism, division and alienation. We cannot go on contemplating a society in which we bury murder victims, condemn terrorism or rely on divisions which have more to say about failures in the past than hope for the future.

More than any other generation we have the opportunities to build a better future. More than any other generation we have seen what division really means. More than any other generation we have counted the cost of alienation.

The world is moving on, rapidly. All over this globe historic break-throughs are taking place between people alienated from each



other. Here in Ireland we run the risk of becoming an outcast and marginalised society if we do not grasp for ourselves the atmosphere of reconciliation elsewhere.

**THE VERY REVEREND JOHN CROOKS:**

Sadly this will be the last Synod attended by one of our honorary secretaries, the Dean of Armagh, Dean John Crooks. Few clergy of our Church can have such a claim to long and distinguished service to the central bodies of the Church of Ireland. The Dean was ordained in 1938 and over the years of his ministry he has made a truly notable contribution to the life of Armagh Diocese. But it is in the central administration of the Church that most members of Synod will have come into contact with him. His attendance record at Church House has been phenomenal since he became a member of the Representative Body in 1960. Since then he has served on so many committees with immense dedication. In 1965 he became a member of the Standing Committee; he was elected an honorary secretary of the General Synod in 1970; a member of the RB Finance Committee in 1971, the Pension Board in 1976 and its Chairman in 1981. But it will be 'John Crooks the man' we will miss most. Always kindly and courteous in his approach, always thoughtful and considerate when we sought his advise. I recall the words of the former Chief Officer, Mr Harry Roberts, when he said: "If I am ever up against it, the one man I would want in my corner is John Crooks". We will miss his dedicated contribution so much. We wish him and his wife, Betty, many years of well-earned retirement as we thank him for all he has done for the Church of Ireland.

**MR BRISTOW STEVENSON:**

It was with great regret that we learned that Mr Bristow Stevenson of Derry diocese found it necessary to resign as lay honorary secretary of the General Synod. Happily he has made a wonderful recovery from illness but feels he cannot fulfil the duties of that office to the extent he would wish. Such sentiments are typical



of one who placed such a priority on duty. The members of Derry and Raphoe do not need to be reminded of the great service to his Church rendered by Bristow Stevenson. As a former Assessor of this Synod and lay Secretary and in his involvement with the Priorities Fund, he has brought such quiet and unassuming presence to our debates. He has been much respected for his clear legal opinions but most of all for that great sense of duty to which I have referred. We would all want to wish him continuing good health in the days ahead.

**R B SOLICITOR**

We have learned with regret of the retirement of our solicitor at Church House, Mr R Blair White. Mr Blair White has assisted us in so many ways : always courteous, always willing to place his expertise at our disposal. We wish him well in his retirement and thank him for his faithful service to the Representative Body.

**CHIEF OFFICER**

Last year I mentioned the appointment of Mr Robert Sherwood as Chief Officer in succession to Mr H R Roberts. This year we welcome him to the General Synod for the first time in his new responsibilities.

**SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Another member of staff who has taken up his duties since we last met is Mr David Meredith: Secretary to the Board of Education. In these days of great change in education Mr Meredith faces a daunting task. We assure him of our full support.

As I recall the Lambeth Conference I am reminded of the opening words of the Conference prayer:

"O God our Father, you are always leading us  
into fresh understanding of your good providence .."

Fresh understanding is a sign of growth. Fresh understanding of what God wills for His Church is a sign of Christian maturity. For God is not just a calling God. He is a sending God.

Let us begin our work together as those who want to look for signposts along that path. May God bless you all.

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