

GENERAL SYNOD 2017

Motion No.5: The Book of Common Prayer

Proposer: The Revd Adrian Dorrian

Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery

Bishop, members of Synod,

This motion seeks leave from the Synod to introduce a Bill in 2018 to amend, slightly, the modern language version of The Litany in the Prayer Book.

Since the partition of Ireland, the liturgy of the Church has reflected the fact that the Church of Ireland serves two different countries. This is why there are state prayers for use in Northern Ireland and others for use in the Republic of Ireland, and likewise why there are versicles and responses in both the daily office and in the traditional language version of The Litany that reflect the two different political jurisdictions.

The Litany Two, the modern language version, includes a petition for the European Union. It says: “Bless the European Union, and draw us closer to one another in justice and freedom”. For good or for ill, by the time the General Synod gathers in 2019 Northern Ireland will no longer be a part of the European Union, based on the timetable that is intended to follow the triggering of Article 50. Hopefully we won’t need passports to get there, but regardless the political reality behind the inclusion of this petition in The Litany will have changed.

Reading the petition, there is no reason that it could not be used in a country outside the EU, but its inclusion in the state prayers section assumes membership of the EU as a default.

Other state prayers, that are specific to the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, explicitly state whether Northern Ireland or the Republic through the use of red brackets and the initials NI or RI. Therefore, in theory at least, the standard liturgies of the Church preclude praying for the government in another political jurisdiction as a ‘state prayer’. These changes would not go so far. By inserting red brackets around the petition and response, the intention is to make the inclusion or the exclusion of the petition optional. In other words, it would entirely appropriate for the petition to be used in Northern Ireland after Brexit, but not required. It should also be noted that the expectation would remain that it forms a part of the state prayers and would therefore be included when being used in the Republic of Ireland.

This is not a statement on Brexit, but rather a reflection of a political reality – just as each of our state prayers does the same. The fate of the EU will continue to be relevant for people in Northern Ireland, but any prayers for the EU will naturally take a different flavour within a non-member state.

It may also seem strange that this small item of parenthesis be subject to a two-year bills process, but it is a change to the prescribed liturgies of the Church of Ireland, albeit a minor one, and it is right that it be subject to such rigours. It is also a moment of historical significance – as the inclusion of other jurisdiction specific state prayers were in their time – and so it is right that this Synod treats it with the appropriate gravity.

I move that motion no 5, ‘That, in accordance with the provisions of Section 26(1) of Chapter I of the Constitution, leave be given for the introduction of a Bill in the General Synod 2018 to amend the Book of Common Prayer (2004; rev ed. 2005), by making changes to The Litany in Contemporary Language as set out in the schedule to this Resolution’ be carried by the Synod.