

Archbishop Clarke's Synod Presidential Address is provided below.

FULL TRANSCRIPT OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S PRESIDENTIAL 2018 ADDRESS

I begin by welcoming you all to the General Synod here in Armagh, and in particular I want to welcome those who are new members, or who are returning after a period away from us, and of course also to welcome warmly our visitors from other Christian traditions.

For those who are new to General Synod, I would say that we will try to make you feel at home. The structures of Synod are necessarily formal, but I hope that this will not prevent you from feeling that you have your part to play in the life of this Synod, and in particular in the debates that are very much part of our work. There is also a pleasant social aspect to General Synod, and there is always an opportunity to make new friends and to renew acquaintance with old friends. We speak often and perhaps too glibly of the Church of Ireland as being in many respects a large family, but that should not be taken as either an exhausted cliché or a pious aspiration; it's not entirely without effort! Enjoy General Synod 2018 and enjoy Armagh.

Before moving to the main part of my address I would like us, as always, to remember before God those who have served General Synod in the past and who have moved into his nearer presence. In the eyes of God no one is of more or less significance than anyone else, but I hope you would wish to recall the great contribution of Archbishop Donald Caird, former Archbishop of Dublin, to the life of Synod in earlier times, as with clarity, integrity, charm and also with phenomenal wit (at times bordering on the surreal), he influenced Synod in many ways over many years.

This General Synod, if we are to understand our work as we should, is (as should be the case with every synod) to be about God, God's will and God's purposes, and our humble and fallible place within that divine will and purpose. We have been reminded in a celebration within the past year – in the autumn of 2017 with the five hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation – that we in the Church of Ireland and, indeed, the whole Anglican tradition are part of something larger than ourselves. Although 2017 was indeed technically an anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation – not the Swiss or the Anglican Reformations – it was a celebration shared by all the main Christian traditions. This included a respectful marking of the event by the Roman Catholic Church, itself the target of Luther's reforming zeal in October 1517. The Reformation celebrations were a reminder to us all that we should never become infatuated with our own importance or virtue.

But to turn to another upcoming celebration – although this is very much still the year 2018, it is probably worth reminding members of General Synod that next year, 2019, marks an important landmark for the Church of Ireland, 150 years since the disestablishment of this Church in the summer of 1869. It is certainly worth using this coming year to reflect on where we have come from, because it is only when we do this that we can map out where we wish to go. This is not a call for an extended history seminar, but rather the conviction that we need to be thoroughly honest about what we truly are. And we cannot do this in isolation either from the world around us, or from the factors that have made

the Church of Ireland at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century the kind of community it is.

Shortly after lunch today, we will be launching a commentary on the Constitution of the Church of Ireland. This is no dry legal text book but rather a way of helping the membership of the Church of Ireland to understand the way we try to do our structural business (and as a Church we have to have proper and consistent structures, however much some might wish it otherwise). I will be saying more about this when we come to the launch itself, but I would like it noted within this address how grateful I am to Sir Paul Girvan, who has thrown both energy and expertise into this project, and who has maintained an invigorating momentum within the distinguished team who worked with him on this enterprise. But there are also hopes that a series of essays may appear later next year on what has happened both within – *and to* – the Church of Ireland, in the fifty years since the centenary of its disestablishment. 1969 was a different place when we did things differently. And there are also plans underway for a group of what we might call “outsiders” to take a cool look at us, as a Church, and let us know in a short report what we might be doing well but also what we might be doing badly, and to challenge us as to where we need to think again about our priorities and our prevailing mindsets. In addition, there is detailed planning taking place for a number of events marking 2019 as a milestone for the Church. And why should any of this matter?

A recent and fascinating book by the historian David Andress has the arresting title, *Cultural Dementia*. He is not using the term “dementia” either casually or hyperbolically; as he points out, his own father died with dementia only a couple of years ago. What Andress is suggesting, however, is that the culture in which we live is in a state akin to dementia. It cannot accurately connect the past with the present. It can obsess about small things half-remembered, that are utterly disconnected from present reality. It can become angry and even paranoid without reason. This is a compelling analysis of our culture, and one that we should be honest enough to relate to church communities. We too can obsess about things that are no longer real, and mythologise randomly about a past that is simply not there any longer. If we are going to reflect with integrity and courage (but hopefully not self-indulgently or self-obsessively) about what we are and where our next steps should be taking us, we surely need to look at markers that should be our points of reference. We are certainly to be a Church focussed on mission, but we also need to get our bearings clear, even as we embark on that task.

We need first of all to be **a safe Church**. By that I mean that we are to be a place not only where people may be safe, but also where they may find safety. You may remember that last year, in the course of speaking about the dreadful levels of domestic violence in this country, I mentioned that the two cathedrals in Armagh hoped to undertake the necessary instruction and inspection in order to be designated as “safe places” for those who needed to be assured of finding help, when faced with the horrors of violence in the domestic setting. This has now been done, really as a type of pilot scheme for the dioceses with the hope that other parishes in Armagh may now be ready to follow suit. I know that the Dean of Armagh would be happy to speak to anyone here who wishes to learn more about the process.

But ensuring that the Church is a place of safety requires more than this. It is certainly true that the civil authorities, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, rightly demand very high standards of compliance in safeguarding young people, and we seek to mirror this in our safeguarding of children. From this General Synod onwards, there will also be a code underpinned in Church law, again fully compliant with civil law, not simply of good practice but of essential practice in our ministry among adults at risk of harm, and those in need of care and protection. This will impose heavy demands on parishes, large and small, in every part of this island but this is not an option, it is an imperative. Yes, “the state” demands that we take our safeguarding responsibilities with huge seriousness. But it is also a fundamental Christian duty to ensure that no carelessness or apathy on our part endangers anyone; all must be able to know for certain that they are not only loved, but safe within our Church communities. Short cuts are not to be tolerated. We know that for many people on this island, the idea of the Church claiming to be a place of safety seems risible and contemptible. We must ensure that such contempt can never be justifiable in the future. It is not only a matter of our reputation in the eyes of society. It is an unequivocal demand of the Kingdom of God.

We are called also to be **a symbol of generosity**. Generosity is of course a slippery word, and “a lack of generosity” can readily be slung out as a slogan when people simply do not get their own way. But generosity is more akin to understanding what Jesus spoke of, when he called on his disciples “to go the second mile” with others. In recent months the Church leaders group called on political leaders *to go this second mile* in the political setting of Northern Ireland. But whether our concern for generosity from our politicians is in the context of a political impasse in Northern Ireland or a housing crisis in the Republic, we can only ask of others what we ourselves – as Church – are truly seeking to model.

This entails a generosity to our fellow Church members that is of every kind. We need to treat one another not only with courtesy but with generosity in speech and action, in particular for those who are struggling in any way. Such generosity may be in direct giving to parishes which need greater financial support. I very often hear the cry, “That should be a central Church responsibility”, but the central Church does not possess a proverbial ‘magic money tree’ and it can only do what it is enabled to do, in part from its limited resources (which are mainly inherited assets), but also from the current generosity of members of the wider Church of today, who wish to see the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ flourish, and not simply within their own parochial boundaries.

We are facing challenges of a different kind in our parochial settings, in ensuring rigorous compliance, not only with our safeguarding protocols but also with other requirements of the civil authorities, in the areas of charities law and also of data recording and protection. I know very well that for clergy, in every part of the Church of Ireland, this is now a matter for real stress. These necessary compliance issues are not areas of expertise for most of the clergy, but much of the work must be done at local level; it cannot be serviced from elsewhere. In speaking of generosity, may I genuinely plead that members of the laity who have talent in these areas (and for whom it is not a major ordeal to ensure that a total compliance with state law is achieved) would volunteer of their time and capability to work with their own clergy, and even perhaps with those in neighbouring parishes? This is a form of generosity that is extremely necessary at present.

But modelling generosity should also be in supporting others – within our wider communities – who have insufficient to live with any dignity, or even to feed their families properly. There is no county on this entire island where this is not an undeserved reality for some.

Further afield, on my recent visit to northern Zambia with CMS Ireland, I was reminded again how it is very often those who have least in material terms who have the most upbeat and lustrous religious faith. In a Church where clergy – for example – must live (and support families) on little more than the equivalent of \$100 per month in a country that does not have a particularly low cost of living, there was no palpable sense of despair or resentment, but rather of joy in the Gospel. This, however, should not prevent us from showing a greater sense of responsibility – financial and human resourcing – to the realities of existence in places where life is a constant struggle. If we are serious about being an outward-looking Church we must also be an outward-giving Church.

But then, in the culture in which we live, we must strive also for what I would term as real **“agility” as a Church community**. A phrase coined by a great humanist writer of our era, Zygmund Baumann, shortly before his death, was ‘liquid modernity’. By this, Baumann meant that we are living in a time when there seems to be no permanence – no solid ground – beneath our feet as a society. Whether economically, culturally, politically or socially, we have lost any sense of solidity, of certainty, of permanence. This is undoubtedly a major factor in the rise of a toxic and aggressive populism that is threatening everything in the world around us that we have long taken for granted. People grasp for old certainties even when these are unattainable and even pernicious. It is fascinating that another writer who spoke in similar terms about the erosion of the foundations of everything we take as a given in terms of proper societal norms, was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in Germany at the outset of the Second World War. To that, we should surely pay serious heed.

But, as Christian disciples living in liquid modernity, what are we to do; in the words of the psalmist, “What can the righteous do?” They must, first and most importantly, recall the solid foundations on which we are to rely in any place and time – in the words of the traditional prayer for the work of the General Synod, that we may “evermore hold fast and abide in the Apostolic and true Catholic faith”. But we must also be ready to think carefully *and critically* about everything around us, and indeed about ourselves. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt, best remembered for her phrase, ‘the banality of evil’, also warned us that human *stupidity* is often not a lack of intelligence, but rather an unwillingness to think critically. And in this sense, stupidity is also a primary source of evil in the world. If we are to think critically and analytically, then we must be able to act with agility in a world where the certainties around us have dissolved into liquid, and herein lies the challenge. We must seek to balance the folly of imagining that the latest whim is a panacea for every issue we have to face (when it may actually be plain daft), with the careful and necessary analysis of the new idea which may take such a length of time to process that, by the time we make a decision, we will be so far behind the proverbial curve that we might as well not bother putting it into effect.

In the work of Bishops' Appeal, we do see how decisions that must be made quickly – for example, in sending financial aid to areas of sudden natural disaster – can be made speedily. But in the main there is no easy way to combine being elastic in our thinking with being analytically rigorous, whether in relation to ministry, to property, or to any projects designed by good people to extend God's Kingdom on earth. This is one of our greatest challenges, and one that we must face head on, set in the changing, liquid and precarious culture in which we live. But that world 'out there' remains a world loved by God, and therefore a world in which we must play our part with courage, integrity and wisdom.

As I draw near to a close, I want (as always, but with no lack of sincerity) to thank our central Church staff for their immense conscientiousness and proficiency in providing for the structural needs of the Church of Ireland. These are not easy times, I am fully aware, but I hope we all understand how much we rely on those who work for the good of the Church, whether in the Dublin or Belfast offices. There are many others to thank. During the course of the Synod I hope that we will be aware of, and express gratitude to, the many people who give freely – in every sense – of their time, energy and expertise to the committees and boards of the central Church, which are so essential in supporting the ongoing mission of the Church of Ireland.

A final point... Later today, Archbishop Eamon Martin and I will be giving a type of *formal launch* here at Synod for an initiative pioneered a couple of years ago by the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'Thy Kingdom Come'. It was, and is, a call to a global wave of prayer over the ten days from Ascension to Pentecost. It spread rapidly beyond the Church of England to other Christian traditions in Britain, and then on to the wider Christian world. Our hope is that in 2018, we will – certainly in our own dioceses but ideally throughout the island – be joining a global flood of prayer that God's Kingdom, God's perfect rule and perfect love, may be advanced on earth and become ever more apparent to all people. But, essentially, we must also remember that at every time of the year and in every place, you and I must become better at the business of praying. I imagine (and even hope) that few of us are satisfied with our own prayer lives. The prayer of all its members – however hesitant, clumsy, shallow and unskilled our praying may feel for some of us – is surely something on which the Church must be truly able to rely, if it is to face its future with confidence, with hope, and hence even with joy.

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