

Your Grace and members of the Synod.

I am pleased to have been asked to be the second presenter of the Report of the Representative Church Body to this General Synod. And if I may do so, I would begin with an expression of appreciation to the previous speaker, Mr. Sydney Gamble, who has set out the main thrust of the Report in a way which is within the understanding of most members of this Synod. Having known the said gentleman for many years through his membership of the Representative Church Body and his Chairmanship of the Executive committee of that Body, that was to be expected. As a result of his clear and concise presentation I do not intend to look at the Report in any detail. What I want to do instead is by way of a reflection of what I have observed at meetings of the R. C. B. and more particularly at meetings of the Executive. At meetings of the Executive Committee members come to discuss the various issues on the Agenda, without any alternative agenda. From my experience that does not always happen with Church Committees, dare I say rarely happens. Around the table at meetings of the Executive every member, as far as I have observed, and I have been there from the formation of the Executive many years ago, every member looks at the issues on the Agenda with the sole purpose of how best to address that issue. And on the Executive we are well served by the lay members who bring skill and knowledge and years of experience from a wide variety of occupations and professions - finance, legal, property, personnel, - to mention but a few. This Church is well served by those eight individuals. That is not intended to down play the contribution of Your Grace and your two Episcopal colleagues, or that of the other two clergy. On page 5 of the Report there is a list of the Chairpersons of the various Committees. As a Church we are indebted to them all for the skill they bring to the task and for their free giving of time.

With that I would pay tribute to the staff of Church House, the Chief Officer, heads of departments and all others. What I see when I attend meetings of the R C B or of the Executive Committee are individuals for whom service to the Church seems to be a vocation.

As indicated earlier by Mr. Gamble, we are living in difficult times, from

an economic point of view, and it would be rash to make any prediction about the future. Appreciation must be expressed about the efforts that have been made to reduce expenditure, as mentioned by Mr. Gamble. In the normal run of life organizations have a sort of an inbred tendency to grow and expand. Parishes move it up to the Diocese, so Dioceses need more administration staff. Dioceses in turn move it up to Church House, again the need for more staff. Perhaps there is a spark of light, or an opportunity, in the present economic darkness, that of a necessary determination to limit growth in administration, whether within the Representative Church Body, the Dioceses or parishes throughout the length and breadth of the country. Dare I suggest reduce!

From the present economic difficulties as they affect the Representative Church Body there are useful lessons. Over the years the R C B has worked at building up a reserve. And over the years many questioned the wisdom, or the necessity, or the faith element, in that pursuit. Well, had that policy not been pursued the Representative Church Body might by now be bankrupt. Imagine the consequences. Surely here is a lesson for parishes, dioceses and Central Church – the folly of not preparing for a rainy day. Again and again in parishes and in dioceses you will hear it expressed, 'why have money stored away when it could be put to a useful purpose or outreach.' Surely here is a useful lesson. During the past two years or so, The Representative Church Body has been dependent on its reserves. What would the situation have been had there been no reserves, had it all been spent on projects or other apparently useful pursuits. We hope, not only for the Church but also for the community that things will improve in the near future. In the meantime we must put considerable effort into controlling or even further reducing costs, as Mr. Gamble underlined before his final quotation from Oliver Goldsmith. And we admire his poetic knowledge! I want to finish by expressing appreciation, as Mr. Gamble has done, to all those faithful members of the Church of Ireland, in parishes throughout the length and breadth of the country for their faithful service and witness within the structures of the church.

I have great pleasure in being the second presenter of this Report.