

GENERAL SYNOD 2013

General Synod 2013: Motion relating to the Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief

Proposed by The Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin & Glendalough

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

When last the Church of Ireland met in General Synod at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin in May 2012, we accepted a Motion that sought to hold together three things in the area of human sexuality. They were the following:

- a restatement of the received teaching of the Church of Ireland on marriage;
- a commitment to be generous in our ecclesiastical life in regard to people who are lesbian, gay and bisexual;
- a willingness to listen, hear and meet.

The General Synod found itself in an uncomfortable and a protracted place in 2012. Many people have, in the interim, shown significant attentiveness to others with whose opinions they might not see themselves as agreeing but whose convictions they have come to appreciate and to respect as more than angry or ignorant prejudice. I sense now in 2013 more of a mood of sober carefulness than I have sensed before in relation to this most private of subjects and most invasive of areas. I also sense a proper fearfulness of insult and diminishment of others whom we are only now beginning to understand. If the passage of time has taught us any of this, then it is indeed good that time passes. There is no attractiveness or advantage in ripping ourselves or indeed our polity apart by the

abstracted certainties which, all too readily, make it impossible for us to see the face of Jesus Christ in our neighbour and, I would have to add, in our enemy. This cannot continue to be a game of: cat and cat.

Perhaps all of this movement of the Holy Spirit is part of the organic character of the working of the Church of Ireland that the Primate explored in his Presidential Address. The bishops and the Standing Committee have worked together in drawing together to form this Select Committee the names of people who represent a broad range of human sympathy, life experience and geographical belonging in the complex organism that is the Church of Ireland of today. And the love which all of us have for the Church of Ireland is plain to see. Surely this whole area as now outlined and defined is one on which there is not, nor ought there to be, a solution which is exclusive of others who are different from us, if indeed we are so sure and so confident of our own identity. Perhaps even that much-pilloried word: normative from last year's General Synod will re-emerge as rather useful, all things considered.

My personal concern is that even at this stage, it is all too much about 'us' and not enough about 'them.' Who, then, are "the 'them'"? if you will pardon my grammatical infelicity. "The 'them'" are at very least those whose way of life stands without Canon 31 and who are valued members of the Church of Ireland along with those who will, in subsequent generations, continue to become new active members of the Church of Ireland; "the 'them'" are at very least those whose professional knowledge and nuance, research and insight in the soft and the hard sciences might all too easily be excluded

from the next stage of exploration of this area of human existence. It is for these reasons that there is scope for co-options to the Membership of the Select Committee and I hope that the Members and the chairperson will use this discretion courageously and compassionately, if General Synod accepts the next stage in this process.

In order to help prepare members of the Church of Ireland for whatever will come out of the work of the Select Committee, a series of meetings has been arranged involving triplets of dioceses. Plans for these are well under way and they will I hope fulfil at least the role of listening posts and barometers of understanding for those who undertake the genuinely arduous task of serving on this Select Committee.

So sensitive and painful, damaging and pugnacious might the work of this Select Committee be that there is on the table the recommendation that the Committee have its own chaplain for its lifetime.

In conclusion, I say just a couple of things. The appointment of this Select Committee is a definitive opportunity for the Church of Ireland General Synod to look itself face to face in the mirror and to see if it - that is you and I - can live with what we see to be ourselves and see to be the people before and behind us in that very looking-glass. There is now no escape. We have decided that the issue of human sexuality is best explored in the context of Christian belief; and I am convinced that this is entirely right for us. Remember that others are already asking us where they fit into our scheme of things, in the context of Christian belief, and they will continue to do so and that is their entitlement of

engagement with us, however uncomfortable for all. This not an internal or an implosive exercise; it is not a work of self-satisfaction or of self-righteousness. This is a work of mission and of service, a ministry of teaching and of compassion.

On behalf of all present I should like to thank all who already have put so much time, prayer, thought and action into getting us to this point. One of them is my Secunder and there are many others, all unsung. Ladies and gentlemen, Members of Synod, I encourage you to accept this Motion and to proceed with alacrity and with good grace.