

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2014**

### **MOTION 14 – PRIDE IN PEOPLE AND PAST**

**Proposed by Dr Alan Acheson, Diocese of Connor**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Motion - That this House appeals to the Church to take pride in her people and her past.**

I refer first to my article published in the *Church of England Newspaper* in its St Patrick's day issue 1961, a mere 53 years ago. (To put that into perspective, the Bishop of Cork was just starting to walk.) My theme was the plight of loyal, faithful Church of Ireland members who were then being denounced and disowned. I speak of the Evangelicals at that time. Theirs had been our Church's defining tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That counted for nothing a century later.

Reflecting now on that injustice, I perceive that our Church has a poor record in her attitude to minorities. In Bishop Jebb's day it was the Methodists who, to his great distress, were driven from the Church. In our day it is faithful Church people who are gay and lesbian. Common characteristics, I suggest, inform such attitude. It springs from ignorance and fear, it presents in hatred and malice. I felt that fifty years ago. I see it again now.

The irony here is that with our tradition again secure, many of us Evangelicals exhibit the same attitude once visited upon us. We need to heed Alwyn Thomson's words, in a recent ECONI publication:

We proclaim ourselves defenders and proclaimers of the truth of God, yet our truth is loveless and graceless, sometimes vicious and embittered.

In the light of that perception, we need to rethink our attitude, and to bring it under judgment.

I want, secondly, to speak about our Church's attitude to her past, and specifically the pulsating 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two Canadian historians, the late Desmond Bowen and D. H. Akenson, have been pioneers here in primary research. Don Akenson has been honoured with a D.Litt by our Queen's University; Dr Akenson's work for us, however, has been unacknowledged by our Church. For ourselves, we appear to be silenced by political correctness, obsessed with secondary sources, and unwilling, as Conor Cruise O'Brien put it, to get our hands dirty in primary sources such as newspapers.

The late Prof. Donal Kerr told me of finding in the *Freeman's Journal* the names of dozens of our clergy who had died while engaged in famine relief. That sacrificial work of our clergy, and of clergy wives, cries out for serious attention. So too does that of our church's home missionary record. Or again, the role of *our* Trinity College Dublin as the beating heart of evangelical orthodoxy and outreach. And not least in that context a life of Dr George Salmon is long overdue.

And above all, there is our unique and vital pioneering work and leadership overseas: by clergy and laity, men and women, of all traditions of the Church of Ireland. Bishop Bond of Montreal, a Cornishman, said bluntly that the English were useless as pioneers in the Canadas. Not so the Irish. We can indeed boldly claim that, whatever its tensions and trials today, without the Church of Ireland's unique contribution there would have been no Anglican Communion. Let us then do the research and take pride in our Church's incomparable history in the nineteenth century.