

NB : Strict Embargo : 14 May 2002 : 11.30 am

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CHURCH OF IRELAND

GENERAL SYNOD 2002

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

***The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames
Archbishop of Armagh
Primate of all Ireland***

**The Conference Centre
Stillorgan Park Hotel, Dublin**

14 May 2002

My lords, members of the General Synod, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I welcome you to this meeting of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and pray that Almighty God will guide and bless us as we gather to exercise our responsibility for this part of the Church of God.

SYNOD PROCEDURE

This year we have a heavy agenda, particularly in matters liturgical and I thank the Honorary Secretaries, Valerie Beatty and the Staff of General Synod for all their preparation work. Among your papers you will have received a document which is designed to communicate the intricacies of procedure. By tradition we follow parliamentary procedure in legislation. I recognize that this can be a frustrating and time consuming method but it is also a method which has stood the test of time. I hope you will find that document helpful throughout this week.

THE INDIVIDUAL

In my Address last year I drew attention to the role of the individual in Irish society. As I considered the Agenda for this year's Synod and reflected on the happenings of the past twelve months I felt the need to take that thinking a stage further. Many labels will be tied by future commentators on this period of history but surely one that will figure largely has to do with the nature of the individual and the meaning of individualism.

Christ and the Individual

None can doubt the importance of the individual in Christian teaching or experience. The individual-related ministry of Christ lies at the core of our understanding of the Incarnation. In fact the New Testament experience moves steadily from the Incarnational emphasis on the individual - the person created in the image of God, created to worship, to respond and to follow - to the expression of the relationship of the individual to the Body of Christ, the Church. The new relationship between God and humankind, which is manifested by the Incarnation became a reality within the evolving Church as recorded in Acts. The personal nature of Christ's approach to the individual found its collective expression as the early Church took form and substance. But it was and still remains a personal experience of individuals responding to the call and nature of God.

Pastoral Ministry and the Individual

Historically Anglicanism for its part has walked the sensitive path which has recognized this central premise while placing it within the structure of a pilgrim Church where scripture, tradition, reason and the synodical process have together continued to make a contribution to the whole '*people of God*'. Within that family of autonomous but closely connected Provinces the Church of Ireland has found its place. For generations we have emphasized the pastoral nature of Ministry. In fact if we read the Journals of the General Synod over the years time and again we find evidence of this emphasis on the importance of pastoral concern for the individual. When I visit parishes throughout Ireland I am again reminded of the value of ministry to people. We have resisted the pressures of the times to become over-structured at the expense of personal ministry. I pray that may long be the case. In visits to other parts of the Church abroad I have seen the dangers of structures which tend to alienate the basic, down-to-earth needs of people as people. Let us as a Synod note the dangers – and reaffirm our call to pastoral ministry. I hope this

will emerge from our forthcoming Summit on Ministry as a priority for clergy and laity alike.

Irish Society and the Individual

It is when we turn to society that some of the real dangers of de-personalisation become obvious. People talk about '*not counting any more as individuals*'. We hear phrases like: '*a number on a list*', '*a figure on a computer*', '*an 'X' on a ballot paper*' or simply '*a statistic in a census*.' There are many, for example, who feel the process of government in both Irish jurisdictions has marginalized them through a process of what is now termed '*spin-doctoring*'. There is a new and dangerous degree of disenchantment with the political process just as there is a questioning of many aspects of institutional life. Of course society is changing. Ireland is changing, north and south. New ways of analysing values are emerging. But economic and material progress has not always taken account of the value of the individual. The speed of change has at times left us breathless. But there have been casualties – there has been a human cost. It is more important than ever that the Church proclaims the sanctity of the individual life and the priceless value of the individual before God. The gift of that individual life must be appreciated, recognized and their needs addressed if Ireland is to be a truly caring, compassionate society.

The violent society devalues people. Sectarianism like racism devalues people. Poverty and social alienation devalues people. Injustice and the failure to address **real** rather than imagined needs devalues.

From the standpoint of the Gospel imperative anyone or any condition which devalues or depersonalises the sanctity of the individual made in the image of God must be addressed. This is surely the social ministry of the people of God. Ireland is not immune from this process.

A Wake-up Call to Irish Society

Without apology and as a Churchman let me make this call from the Synod. Too much is happening in Ireland, north and south, which not only devalues life but threatens our claim to be a caring and compassionate society. We must waken up and recognize that publicity or political pronouncements which are soon forgotten are not enough.

What are some of the threats to the value of the individual in Ireland today:

- the increasing number of people in both our jurisdictions who are living at or below the poverty level
- the manipulation of industrial or commercial interests often of an international nature which appear to give scant attention to the unemployment caused
- the abuse of children often by those who occupy positions of trust.

- the treatment of asylum seekers
- the manipulation of young people by the godfathers of violence, particularly in Northern Ireland
- the presumed failure of those elected to political positions to be seen to address the real needs of healthcare and providers in ways which people can see as productive and realistic

and

- the cynical misuse of power, position, trust and authority by some for their own betterment as recent Tribunals in the Republic have indicated.

All of these have a knock-on effect on the quality of life. They threaten the sanctity of individual lives. They contrast sharply with the desire of most for a caring and just society.

I welcome the establishment of the Church in Society Committee, replacing the Role of the Church Committee and I hope it will help us to address some of these issues in a realistic manner.

The Church of Ireland and Individualism

Within the Church we are reminded of a paradox. The needs of the individual life demands a personal Ministry. But at the same time individualism can contain its own dangers. Too often the watch-words seem to be - my own parish right or wrong, my own view of the Gospel right or wrong, my own ideas of Ministry right or wrong. While we emphasise the importance of the individual before God we must surely be aware of and address the dangers of individualism. In the years of Ministry of many clergy at this Synod we have seen such a great change in attitudes across the Church of Ireland. It is not a question of rules or regulations, it is not a case of stifling individual initiatives in Ministry – but it is a case of recognizing what we stand for as a Church. We are inheritors of an ethos which speaks of due order, decency and moderation. Extremes in worship, extremes in attitudes or the view *‘anything is permissible’* hold grave dangers for what we as a Church have to contribute to the People of God. The ecumenical pilgrimage has caused all Churches to examine their way of doing things. But our contribution to each other will be diminished greatly if we do not offer a vision of holiness, a Ministry of reconciliation and a caring compassion which is based on the precious traditions of the Faith once delivered by a Ministry which is thankful for rather than apologetic for the very best Anglicanism can offer.

The Church of Ireland is a family. Over the years it has maintained that atmosphere. Bearing one another’s burdens, overcoming misunderstandings of each other, learning to tolerate each other’s attitudes – all and more are examples of that fragile but tangible

unity of purpose in any family. In that process the individual has been emphasised. Let us not now fall into the trap of excessive individualism in Ministry or practice.

Individual Exploration

As we search the unlimited depths of God's love for the individual and for His Body, the Church, let us recognise the freedom to explore. But let us be mindful that this is a precious freedom which must accept the eternal truths which are the framework for our exploration.

CHURCH OF IRELAND – METHODIST COVENANT

The term 'covenant' is a highly Biblical one. In Holy Scripture God's covenant with his people is made by grace. It involves healing and forgiveness. Covenant survives the changing face of human nature and human experience. It is God who calls – and it is God who enables. It is God who keeps faith. Therefore when we examine the work of those representing the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland which has produced the proposed Covenant involving both our Churches we are looking at something which calls for prayerful and sincere consideration. On behalf of the Synod I thank all those who through the years have devoted so much time to producing this statement.

Shortly I will invite the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Reverend Harold Good, to speak to us. I welcome him not alone as the elected leader of his Church but as an old and trusted friend. We were at school together. I will invite him to speak from a Methodist perspective, just as I will be privileged to address the Methodist Conference in a few months time.

The Covenant which is before the General Synod is a document of immense significance. But it is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end – a stepping stone on the long road to discovering God's will for the future of two historic Irish Churches. Methodism and Anglicanism in Ireland have developed in different ways so far as structures are concerned – but they have each cherished so much in common. Biblical truth, evangelism, lay ministry, common views on community issues, the sharing of some Church plant, to name but a few. Historically John Wesley was a high churchman as the eighteenth century understood that term. In the beginning Methodism was a movement within the Church of England even though in Wesley's lifetime and certainly from his death in 1791 Methodism drew apart from the Church of England.

Here in Ireland our two Churches decided some years ago that the time had come to begin a prayerful dialogue which would search God's will for how we could draw closer together. We needed to understand each other better. We needed to see what we shared in common – and we needed to be honest as we spelt out our differences.

In any step towards greater co-operation and understanding misconceptions can easily arise. While we acknowledge the prayerful and careful discussions of our joint working

party we must also acknowledge that any step into the unknown involves the removal of genuine apprehensions.

The Covenant that is before us is simply another step in a long journey which began as far back as the 1930s. The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland remain two separate Churches but this Covenant opens the door for a special relationship between us. The full nature of that relationship will emerge as we travel further together. That journey will also allow both Churches to address in depth the remaining theological issues which have emerged.

In commending this Covenant to the General Synod it is my prayer that as fellow pilgrims on a journey of hope God will make his will clear to us all.

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP ORGANISATION

Those parishes which have benefited from the services of the Christian Stewardship Office over the years have expressed regret even dismay at the news that the organisation in its present form is to close. The Truscott Report recommended a complete change of direction for our Church in stewardship policy with a new emphasis on mission. The Central Committee has acknowledged the need for this change in emphasis and while I declare an interest as Chairman of the organisation I want to say several things about this development.

I express the gratitude of the Church of Ireland for the faithful service of Stewardship Organisers over the years. I thank Mr Murray Hunter, Mrs Rosemary Patterson and Mrs Ann Drury for their loyalty and dedication to the Church.

It would be all too easy for the Church of Ireland to acknowledge the service of the Stewardship Office and to move on to other concerns but there are questions to be asked – and answers to be given.

What is the theology of stewardship? Raising the levels of financial support at a parish level or raising money for a particular project is one aspect but how do we relate love and allegiance to the Church of Ireland with the need to be practical? Through the work of the Stewardship Organisation many people learned the importance of involvement in a parish with an equal emphasis on financial giving. *'Time and Talents'* may sound an outdated phrase – but there are many who have been brought into active participation in their parish through a stewardship programme. What needs to be done to fill the vacuum which will exist from the end of June with the closure of the present organisation if we are to provide the resources to help parishes to help themselves? I do not deny the financial realities which demanded a change of direction in our present arrangements. But I do plead that the Truscott Report and its implications are not allowed to gather dust on our shelves. Somehow the mission of the Church must be allied to a new and modern means of addressing financial support.

ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN

The recent news of the forthcoming retirement of the Archbishop of Dublin has been received with sincere regret across our Church and beyond.

I want to pay tribute this morning on two levels to my colleague, Archbishop Walton Empey.

First, on the corporate level I pay tribute on behalf of the Church he has served so long and faithfully and the Church which has honoured him. As a priest in the parochial ministry, as Dean, as Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, as Bishop of Meath and Kildare and then Archbishop of Dublin, Primate of Ireland and Metropolitan he has served with distinction. As Archbishop he has led the southern Province through years of great change and challenge for the people of Ireland. He has been courageous in his public utterances, visionary in his planning and projects : he has borne faithful witness to the ethos of the Church of Ireland in times of theological turbulence. Archbishop Walton has won the respect of people in all Christian traditions in the Republic and he has made his own Church so proud and thankful for his witness in the community.

One of his greatest contributions to the life of the Church has been his pastoral care of clergy and laity. I have heard on many occasions of how his pastoral ministry in rectory, home or hospital has been so appreciated and valued. Dr Empey has himself exemplified the main theme of my Address – the importance of the individual.

Second, I want to say something on a purely personal level.

For the past 21 years Archbishop Walton and I have shared a friendship as bishops which was much more than co-operation on a leadership basis. We have shared concerns, tested ideas and may I presume to say *'shared one another's burdens'*. We have respected each other's judgement and found so much we could share. I know I am going to miss that sharing so much – but I know the friendship will remain.

At his side Louie has been such a tower of strength, a warm and welcoming hostess and the friend of many. I know Walton would be the first to say how much she has contributed in her own right to his ministry.

On behalf of the General Synod I thank Archbishop and Mrs Empey. I pay tribute to their contribution to our lives and I wish them God's richest blessing in the years to come.

EPISCOPAL CHANGES

In the nature of the life of the Church farewells are interwoven with welcomes.

The past year has seen the retirement of Bishop James Mehaffey of Derry and Raphoe, Bishop James Moore of Connor and Bishop Brian Hannon of Clogher.

We thank God for the ministry and leadership of these bishops.

Bishop Mehaffey exercised a long and visionary episcopate in the north west which saw great social progress after the long dark years of violence. Mrs Mehaffey played her own role in the life of our Church as All Ireland President of the Mothers' Union.

Bishop Moore exercised a very personal episcopate in the large diocese of Connor during years when people were struggling to come to terms with an uneasy peace and the new demands that were being made on society. 'North Belfast' was only one example of the community issues which demanded his Christian attention.

In the cross-border diocese of Clogher, Bishop Hannon gave excellent leadership which combined sensitivity, sound teaching and prayerful pastoral care to both clergy and laity. Maeve Hannon played an influential role as the all-Ireland President of the G.F.S.

We wish Jim and Thelma Mehaffey, Jim and Mary Moore and Brian and Maeve Hannon every blessing in retirement.

To their successors we extend a warm welcome. I know you will join me in offering our sincere good wishes to Bishop Alan Harper and Bishop Michael Jackson who have commenced their episcopates and to Archdeacon Ken Good who will be Consecrated as Bishop of Derry and Raphoe on 11 June.

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

The House of Bishops has given prolonged and careful consideration to the system of selection and training for the ordained ministry of the Church of Ireland. The process we have now introduced is the most thorough and transparent possible. The panel of selectors represents clergy and laity and encompasses all theological outlooks in our Church. The College Council is now responsible for running the College at Braemor Park and it deserves every support as it undertakes such heavy and vital duties for our Church.

PRINCIPAL

Last year we said farewell to Canon John Bartlett as Principal and we acknowledged his years of devoted service. In the name of the Synod I welcome Canon Adrian Empey to the College. We are indeed most fortunate that we have been able to call upon a man of such gifts to undertake the leadership of our College.

CHIEF OFFICER

The past year has not only seen clergy changes. The retirement of Mr Robert Sherwood as Chief Officer of the Representative Church Body will bring to an end a long and distinguished period of service to the Church of Ireland. Robert joined the staff of

Church House in 1960 and was appointed Chief Officer in 1988. During that period of vast change in our structures he has exemplified all that is best in Church administration. His work and influence has gone far beyond the strict confines of the RCB. He has been a friend and confidant and a faithful supporter and initiator in central policies. Truly it can be said that he has exercised a personal trusteeship of our business affairs of the highest order. I thank him for all he has done and welcome Dennis Reardon as his successor.

MR JOHN BUTTIMORE

Before we meet again as a Synod John Buttimore will retire from Church House, Rathmines. Few of us will easily forget this quiet and unassuming servant of the Church of Ireland. In particular we will all recall his work over the years for the Pensions Fund. John joined our staff in 1954 and we are in his debt for such a long period of faithful and efficient service in so many ways.

MR RANDALL PLUNKETT

We also said farewell this year to Randall Plunkett, the Solicitor in Church of Ireland House, Dublin. We wish him well in his new office.

COMMUNICATIONS

We welcome two appointments in the important field of communications. Janet Maxwell has become Director of Communications and Brian Parker has been appointed Church of Ireland Press Officer. I thank them both for the work they have already undertaken and wish them well for the future. Jenny Compston continues her faithful work as assistant to the Press Officer in the Belfast Office.

GIRLS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY

This year the Girls' Friendly Society in Ireland celebrates its 125th anniversary. We thank God for its witness to generations of girls in our Church.

MOTHERS' UNION

Paddy Wallace of Connor diocese has been elected the new All Ireland President of the Mothers' Union. We wish her and all who lead this society which is the backbone of many of our parishes God's blessing and guidance for the future.

RETIREMENTS

As this meeting of the General Synod marks the end of another triennial period there are some of our members who because of age will not be returning next year. We thank all

of them for their service to the Church of Ireland at this level. It is invidious to pick out names but I know we will miss the contributions at the rostrum of such as Mrs May, Miss Darling and Commandant Cronhelm of Dublin, the Rt Hon David Bleakley and Mr Bateman of Down, Mr R C Gibson of Connor, Miss Boal of Derry and Mr Roger Weatherup of Armagh. To them and all others who are retiring goes our gratitude and best wishes.

CHANGE

As my references to people both clergy and laity have indicated this has been a year of significant change in personnel for our Church. But the Church of Ireland is greater than any one individual. Let our discussions this week show this clearly. May this remarkable institution, the General Synod, once more show us to be a caring family which *'bears one another's burdens and so fulfils the law of Christ'*.

God bless you all