

**General Synod 2002**  
**Speech seconding the**  
**Report of the Representative Church Body**  
**made by**  
**The Right Reverend Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork**

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**Embargo - until delivery**

Archbishop!

From time to time, Bishops receive anonymous letters. I received one once suggesting that I should initiate a campaign in Cork to have all cats neutered. More recently, however, a phrase from a lengthy anonymous letter about fund-raising in a particular parish jumped out at me. It said: "For the Church to talk about money is a sin..."

This, we know, to be plain wrong. Our Lord himself had plenty to say about it. We should not be ashamed to advocate principles of Christian giving and stewardship. Perhaps there have even been times when we have been too shy about appealing to people to give what is needed in order fulfil Christian ministry.

In many ways, this year's report of the Representative Church Body might be styled "business as usual". To do so, however, would be to underemphasise the challenges and opportunities that this so-called ordinary business gives to the Church of Ireland and its administration. Mr Rankin has already referred to what will no doubt become in our Western mindset another "Titanic moment" - a point in history which was a symbolic pivot - September 11<sup>th</sup> - when the Western world was jolted on its axis. Of immediate local impact to us and more mundane are matters already referred to such as insurance, planning legislation and regulations, discrimination, tax relief and Christian Stewardship.

However, in seconding this report, I wish simply to make two points:

- one concerning administration and ministry
- the other concerning law-making

Concerning administration and ministry, the finely designed balance, creative tension even, in the parallel nature of our Church of Ireland structures, is a reminder that the spiritual and the material cannot be naively separated. As you see on page 10, one serves the other. The Representative Body's "...historic and primary mission is to serve and support the Church's ministry..." There is no shame in harnessing material assets in the service of God and his kingdom.

Decisions of the RB are governed by these dynamics, as articulated in the prayer used at the opening of meetings:

- the sense of stewardship under God
- the sense of responsibility to the ministry of the Church

My point is that good administration with properly managed time, under-girded by adequate resources is fundamental to the fluid working of a Church such as ours. Such creative use of administration, far from being a hindrance, can liberate us and our time for priorities of ministry, and facilitate us, therefore, in responding to God's call.

That is why I worry sometimes when administrative skills and institutional structures are demonised or cajoled by some in the Church; or depicted even as being contrary to what we are really about. Of course, the balance needs to be kept right; making it incumbent on those in administration to keep in

sight the vision of facilitating ministry; and on those in ministry to enter into faithful partnership with those engaged in administration.

We see this balance between administration and ministry in the note on page 7 and the reference to the Policy and Coordination Committee on page 28. The interchange of officers between our parallel structures is a hugely welcome development. Furthermore it indicates that there is some emerging flexibility in the way we use our existing structures.

In this context too, it is right that, on behalf of those of us in the Church who are ordained, I should add our voice of fulsome thanks to both Mr Robert Sherwood and Mr John Buttimore. They have been the embodiment in the administration of this principle of facilitating ministry, and we wish them every blessing for retirement.

My point concerning law-making is catalysed by the references on pages 22 and 23 to Heritage and planning legislation. Here again, I think we need to recover a sense of balance. While we, through the stewardship of our forebears, and the outcome of history, are indeed the trustees of many wonderful things, such trusteeship of heritage and property management are not the Church's core activities. These cannot, therefore, usurp the primary demands on our time, energy and resources. Again there is the need for balance.

Neither we here when legislating for the Church; nor national legislators should underestimate the consequences of decisions taken – some of them unforeseen consequences - for communities of people, particularly dispersed or minority communities. Far-sightedness and lateral thinking are needed.

Examples might be taken from the world of Education, or Marriage and Family Law, but in this context, I refer to the *Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1999* and the *Planning and Development Act, 2000*, in this jurisdiction.

This is the legislation which, in effect, makes us the proud owners of church buildings which are now listed as heritage buildings.

In the past, parishes, in the main, insured buildings for replacement only. Now listed buildings have to be insured for reinstatement with a consequent rise in insurance premiums. I think, for example, of one West Cork parish with 92 households – 263 individuals (55 of whom are under 18 and 71 of whom are over 61) who find themselves this year with a 73% increase in insurance costs following the listing of their buildings. Furthermore, I calculate that parochial communities in a Diocese such as ours, with a population of about 8000, in addition to their on-going costs, are faced at this time with having to raise an astonishing €11.1 million in respect of anticipated essential works on heritage buildings, one of them - Saint Mary's Collegiate Church in Youghal, a national monument.

Small communities of faith with big heritage portfolios do not have the resources to fulfil this legislation, nor is there the mechanism for allocating sufficient funds to enable them to do so. If something is genuinely national heritage, then there needs to be a national process of funding the maintenance of such heritage.

The end result may, I believe, be the closure of some churches, and far from the heritage being maintained some buildings will become jettisoned waste on the landscape. Worse still it will undermine the administrative confidence and perhaps threaten the institutional existence of some minority communities.

Archbishop, on this note of appeal in support of the ecumenical approach being made to government about this worrying dilemma, referred to on page 22, I have pleasure in seconding the report of the Representative Church Body.