

## **Full text of the Archbishop's presidential address to General Synod:**

At the end of yesterday afternoon's proceedings the Archbishop of York said that the presidents would be consulting overnight in the light of Synod's decision not to give final approval to the proposed legislation about women in the episcopate. We met last night, and we also this morning had the opportunity of an informal discussion with members of the House of Bishops. And what I say is in the light of those meetings.

I have already said something in public about my personal reaction to yesterday's vote and I don't want to repeat now what I said then, or offer a commentary on other people's comments. But there are a few things that perhaps it would be helpful to say today, from the chair, before we move on, as we must, to the rest of today's business.

Whatever decision had been made yesterday, today was always going to be a difficult day. There would have been, whatever decision was made, people feeling that their presence and their significance in the Church was in some sense put into question. There would be people feeling profoundly vulnerable, unwanted and unsure. And that means that the priority today, for all of us, is to attend to one another in the light of that recognition. That is to give to one another the care that we need, and whatever else we do today and think today and say today, I hope that that is what we shall be able to offer one another.

But today is also an opportunity to express appreciation which I'm sure Synod will share for all those staff members and others in the Synod who have worked so devotedly in the course of this legislative process over the past few years. And while it is invidious to single out any individual, a great deal of the burden of steering this process through has fallen on the steering committee in general and the Bishop of Manchester in particular. Bishop Nigel will be retiring in the New Year, there will be a formal farewell to him later today by the Archbishop of York. But I can't miss this opportunity of recording my personal gratitude to Nigel for the unfailing graciousness and skill that he has shown through this process.

Recognising the work that has been done prompts the reflection that it won't really do to speak as if talking had never started between parties and presences in the Church of England or in this Synod. Nonetheless, in the light of much that was said yesterday, I believe it is very important that we hold one another to account for the promises made of a willingness to undertake and engage urgently in further conversation. I believe that yesterday there was both realism and unrealism in much of what was said, and the realism was largely in the recognition that there is now that urgent demand for close, properly mediated conversation. The offers that were made need to be taken up, the Presidents of Synod and the House of Bishops are very eager that that should happen, and in their meeting in December will be discussing further how that might most constructively be taken forward.

But I have to say, and I hope you will bear with me in my saying this, that there was an unrealism around yesterday as well. The idea that there is a readily available formula just around the corner is, in my view, an illusion. There is no short cut here, there is no simple, God-given (dare I say) solution, to a problem which brings people's deepest convictions into conflict in the way in which they have come into conflict in this Synod and previously. Realism requires us to recognise that; to recognise the depth and seriousness of the work still to be done. The map is clear enough. The decisions we have to make are about the route, and those decisions, given the nature of the terrain, are not going to be simple and straightforward.

So as we enter into further conversation, and as we reflect on the urgency of moving our situation forward, please don't let us be under any misapprehensions about what it is going to demand of all of us, intellectually, spiritually and imaginatively. Part of recognising that also, I think, involves us recognising the greatest risk of all that faces us as a Synod and I suspect as a Church in our internal life. Yesterday did nothing to make polarisation in our Church less likely and the risk of treating further polarisation of views and identity is a very great one. It will feel like the default setting.

If I can be frivolous for a moment, there is a Matt Greening cartoon set in outer space, an appropriate location you might think at the moment, where crisis is impending for the staff of an inter-galactic rocket and they run around saying, 'What do we do, who do we blame?' Well, the temptation to run round saying what do we do, who do we blame today is going to be strong. I hope that we will try and hold back from simple recrimination in all this. So the work to do internally is considerable, but it is tempting to say that is as nothing compared to the work we have to do externally.

We have, to put it very bluntly, a lot of explaining to do. Whatever the motivations for voting yesterday, whatever the theological principle on which people acted, spoke; the fact remains that a great deal of this discussion is not intelligible to our wider society. Worse than that, it seems as if we are wilfully blind to some of the trends and priorities of that wider society. We have some explaining to do. We have, as the result of yesterday, undoubtedly lost a measure of credibility in our society, and I make that as an observation as objectively as I can; because it's perfectly true, as was said yesterday, that the ultimate credibility of the Church does not depend on the good will of the wider public. We would not be Christians and believers in divine revelation if we held that; but the fact is as it is.

We also have a lot of explaining to do within the Church because I think a great many people will be wondering why it is that Diocesan Synods can express a view in one direction and the General Synod in another. That means that Synod itself is under scrutiny and under question; and I shouldn't be at all surprised if many members of Synod and groups within Synod were not feeling today confused and uncertain about how Synod itself works - and whether there are issues we have to attend to there. We rightly insist in the Church of England on a high level of consent for certain kinds of change and the failure to secure a two-thirds majority in the House of Laity doesn't mean that those high levels of consent are necessarily wrong. They do mean that there is a great deal of further work to be done, as I have said. But that sense of a Synod which, for admirable, praiseworthy reasons gives a very strong voice to the minority - that sense of Synod needs some explaining and some exploring if it is not simply to be seen as a holding to hostage of Synod by certain groups. That is part of the explaining we have to do, and we are all, I guess, feeling those uncomfortable questions.

How exactly we structure the conversations which lie ahead, as I have said, will take some time to work out. The House of Bishops will need to be thinking very hard in a couple of weeks' time about how that goes forward, and the Archbishops' Council also meets next week. Bishops of course will meanwhile be taking soundings and pursuing conversations in their own dioceses, and that does bear a little bit on a question later today about the pattern of Synodical meetings next year. We have a proposal that we should meet in July and November next year rather than in February. There is clearly a case for not losing momentum in our discussion. There is also clearly a case for thinking twice about pursuing after a very, very short interval a set of issues that are still raw and undigested. I think the difficult question that Synod will have to address in that context is how we best use the next six months or so. It may be,

for example, that if we do not have the Synod in February, that reserved time should be set aside to some brokered conversations in groups rather smaller than 470. But you may well feel, and I think the House of Bishops as a whole feels, that the full Synod in February is a little close for comfort given all the business, all the emotion, all the consequence we have to explore. The best way of keeping up pressure for a solution may not be to meet in February; but that is of course for further discussion and is in no sense meant to minimise the sense of urgency that we all face. Within that timeframe is when initial conversations have to begin.

After all the effort that has gone into this process over the last few years, after the intense frustration that has been experienced in recent years - and I don't just speak of yesterday - about getting to the right point to make a decision, it would be tempting to conclude that it is too difficult, that perhaps the issue should be parked for a while. I don't believe that is possible because of what I said earlier about the sense of our credibility in the wider society. Every day in which we fail to resolve this to our satisfaction, and the Church of England's satisfaction, is a day when our credibility in the public eye is likely to diminish, and we have to take that seriously: however uncomfortable that message may be. There is a matter of mission here and we can't afford to hang about. We can't, as I said yesterday in my remarks, indefinitely go on living simply theologically with the anomaly of women priests who cannot be considered for bishops.

I mentioned earlier the duty of care that we have which does not lessen with the pressure and complexity of matters we face. But I do also want to repeat something that I said last night, having said that I wouldn't repeat what I said last night, let me say something that I did say I as believe that it is probably worth saying, and that is that in spite of headlines in the press, the Church of England did not vote for its dissolution yesterday. The Church of England in a very important sense cannot vote for its dissolution, because the Church does not exist by the decision of Synod, by the will or personality of bishops or archbishops, by the decision of any pressure group, but by the call of Almighty God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. I hope you will not regard it as disrespectful to Synod if I say that Synod cannot vote to abolish God the Holy Trinity. Therefore, what God asks of the Church and what God equips the Church to do are as true this morning as they were yesterday morning and to paraphrase something I said in another context, God does not wait for us to respond to his call for mission and service until we have solved all our internal problems. We are going to be faced with a great deal of very uncomfortable and very unpleasant accusation and recrimination about yesterday and there is no easy way of getting through that except to endure it. But we can at least say God remains God, our call remains our call, our Church remains our Church and it is in that confidence that, with a good deal of deep breathing and as they say heart-swearing, we prepare ourselves to do our business today in the hope that the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit is what is always is, and always was and always will be. Thank you.