



Your Majesty, we welcome you and His Royal Highness to the 10th General Synod of the Church of England.

It was my predecessor but four, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, who had the honour to welcome you both at the inaugural meeting of the newly created Synod in 1970.

In his remarks he noted that it was thought to be the first occasion on which the sovereign had attended an ecclesiastical synod in this country, even though a variety of convocations, assemblies and synods had existed since the early medieval period.

It is a matter of great pride and rejoicing to us that since then Your Majesty has been present in the Abbey for each of the Synod services, and in this assembly hall for each of the opening ceremonies.

It is an especial privilege to be able to welcome Your Majesty here today, just two months after the present reign became the longest in our nation's history. (Extended applause)

Over the centuries there have been many twists and turns in the relationship between church and state, and in the role played by the Supreme Governor.



My predecessor but two, Archbishop Robert Runcie, reminded Your Majesty in 1985 of the example of Queen Anne, who was a devoted churchwoman but had such a deep dislike of Synods that she was very reluctant to allow the convocation of Canterbury to meet in 1710. (Laughter)

Her minister, Robert Harley, saved the day by offering her this advice. “Let them meet,” he said, “for they like to come up to town.” (Laughter)

“But they shall be on their good behavior. If they prove extravagant, they hurt none but themselves, for we shall pack them off back to their parishes.”

Wise words, which the Archbishop of York and I will keep in mind as the lifetime of this Synod unfolds. (Laughter)

It may also be that there will be moments, in meetings of the Crown Nominations Commission, when we shall regret the passing of those simpler days when the Supreme Governor felt at liberty to decide senior church appointments without too much heed of advice or process.

In 1805, George III’s offer of the See of Canterbury to Charles Manners-Sutton, without consultation even with his prime minister, provoked an indignant protest from William Pitt the Younger, and according to one source an angry exchange such as had rarely passed between a sovereign and his minister.

Even such a royal favourite as Benjamin Disraeli found in 1868 that Queen Victoria disputed three of his first five nominations for bishoprics, and on each occasion got her way. (Laughter)

Since the reign of Queen Victoria things have been rather different – possibly duller. (Laughter)

On the appointment of the new Archbishop of York, Your Majesty’s great grandfather memorably confined himself to offering two pieces of advice to Cosmo Gordon Lang. One, that he should keep the parties in the church together; the other, that he should prevent the clergy wearing moustaches. (Laughter)



When the Church Assembly was established in 1920 the question arose of how Your Majesty's grandfather would be able to mark occasion.

The meeting was at the end of June and unfortunately His Majesty had a prior engagement. But he sent a message, which Archbishop Davidson read out as the members of the assembly stood to attention.

The text is on page one of the report of the proceedings of the Church Assembly. What the report does not reveal is that the message was sent from Newmarket. (Laughter)

On a more serious note, it was 75 years ago this year that Your Majesty's parents came to open this building just as our nation was facing its greatest hour of trial.

Within three months, Church House was damaged by bombs. But it survived and was subsequently able to provide shelter for both Houses of Parliament at various points during the Second World War, as well as hosting some of the preparatory meetings for the United Nations.

This new Synod today gathers in the same building at another moment of great uncertainty and conflict in our world.

We shall in the midst of all our other business want to take time to pray earnestly for the leaders of the nations as they grapple with problems so intractable that solutions are likely to be neither simple nor quick.

As we seek to take counsel together here to discern the mind of Christ for the Church of England, and for those whom we serve in this land, we shall draw strength from knowing that Your Majesty's prayers will be with us.

For our part it will remain our earnest concern to pray that Almighty God will continue to replenish Your Majesty with the grace of the Holy Spirit, enduing her plenteously with all heavenly gifts.

I now call the Joint Registrar of the provinces of Canterbury, York and the Secretary General to make their returns, after which I hope Your Majesty will be pleased to address us.

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