



THE ARCHBISHOP



owing women to become bishops in the Church of England.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, addressed the Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee yesterday about new legislation allowing women to become bishops in the Church of England, which was approved by the General Synod last week.

A transcript of the Archbishop's speech follows:

I'd like to place on record my gratitude, and the gratitude of all of us, for your willingness to arrange today's session so close to the final approval vote in York. And to affirm that, as we said to you, we knew that if we didn't get started until the autumn we risked losing momentum, and might not make it for the November Synod session so that we could enact the Canon when we meet on 17 November. But that is, of course, entirely dependent on the judgement this committee has to make, and the decisions that would then be for the House of Commons and House of Lords.

It's worth noting, you commented on the eight annexes; we have tried to make them complete. I know they are a huge amount of reading and it's very good of you to have read them so quickly. My predecessor, Rowan Williams, said that he could not understand why a yes or no question – should the Church of England have women bishops – had generated arguments of length and complexity as to make the Schleswig-Holstein question look relatively simple.

The annexes you have are absolutely central to the package the Synod agreed last week. The debate was of a particular form which meant there could be no closure until everyone had spoken. You weren't allowed to move to next business or do anything else other than limit the time for which each person spoke. I think we had 74 people speaking, something of that order, from a Synod of over 400 people – and this was not the first time we'd had this discussion. On this particular measure it's the third time, and on the previous measures and discussions of this subject – going back over 30 years – we've had this discussion at some length.

However, we did go through the whole process properly last Monday with great care, chaired by Archbishop Sentamu, the Archbishop of York, the other President of the Synod. The result of that was that we achieved majorities in all three houses of the Synod: 95 per cent in the House of Bishops, 87 per cent in the House of Clergy and 77 per cent in the House of Laity. The pass mark being two-thirds, we were comfortably through on all of them.

It is worth emphasising that the debate last week was not as to whether women should or should not be bishops – that was decided some time ago; it was as to whether this particular form of the process was one that was the best and most appropriate way of dealing with it.

It is also worth saying – and this was said in the debate, and in reporting on it I need to affirm that very clearly – is that inevitably in something of such long drawn out discussion, and following the failure of the measure in November 2012 by six votes in the House of Laity, it is fair to say we've not ended up where any of the main groups in the Church, left to themselves, would have chosen. The traditionalists would have preferred structural solutions with additional dioceses or provinces or transfers of jurisdiction between bishops.

Other groups – for example, WATCH – always argued that there should be as little as possible written down and that we should simply change the law and rely on individual bishops to make pastoral provision locally as a matter of grace and courtesy. That would obviously in many ways be an ideal way forward; but we need to bear in mind that there has developed a culture of, I think suspicion would not be putting it too strongly,

which – despite the remarkable work of the 18 months or so since the failure of the November 2012 measure – has not been completely removed; it has been substantially reduced. Even now, I am sure that you will have heard from those who regretted that such and such an element did not feature in the overall package, and we have to bear in mind that when people feel that for theological reasons they are correct in a particular approach, they tend to have strong views about it. I think my experience in office would have convinced me of that even if I didn't know it before.

The Bishop of Rochester, on my right, chaired the steering committee with enormous skill, and it was their report last October that constituted the breakthrough. Thirteen of the 15 members were prepared to commend it. It was very unusual to have 15 members on the steering committee: we put in everyone right across the spectrum so that the steering committee was a sort of microcosm of the Synod – and that was a deliberate process so that all the arguments were in the steering committee.

We also had a day, a year ago, in the Synod of facilitated discussion around the subject, in small groups, which had never been done before, organised by David Porter with a very significant number of facilitators from around the country – and that, I think it would be fair to say, I'm not exaggerating, has completely changed the atmosphere among the vast majority of the Synod: not only on those matters, but generally in the way we deal with each other. For a number of people it was the first time they'd met those with whom they disagreed.

It was on the back of that that we managed to secure an acceleration of the process through the Synod, the agreement of all 43 dioceses who voted on the package – one diocese, after we'd got through the previous round in February, normally we would have had to wait until November. Standing orders were waived, if I remember rightly, that required a three-quarters majority, which we got. We actually got 90.3 per cent on that occasion, and as a result we were able to shorten the consultation period and take the revision stage over the last series of Synod meetings a week ago.

In the intervening few months a majority of dioceses had to vote in favour or against in their diocesan synods. Forty-three of the 44 met – the one who didn't was Europe, which extends from Vladivostok to Casablanca, and therefore meetings are a touch difficult to arrange. All 43 voted in favour; on the November 2012, 42 had voted in favour. There is much more that I could say, but I hope that gives you a reasonable scope for consideration.

[Watch the full hearing on the Parliament TV website](#)

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