

The case against the Archbishops' Amendment.

Background

The Archbishops' Amendment was presented to General Synod in June 2010 after the Revision Committee had published its carefully crafted and agreed revised draft legislation. It was an untimely intervention. General Synod did not have scrutiny of how it would work legally or in practice. The Amendment proposes that the diocesan bishop should 'co-ordinate' some aspects of episcopal ministry with a male bishop for those parishes that request it, rather than 'delegate' this ministry as in the present draft legislation. ("Co-ordinate" is an ambiguous phrase which means variously "share with a willing colleague" and "give away entirely" – experience shows that such ambiguity does not serve the church as a whole)

General Synod debated this Amendment in July 2010 and it was defeated. For those who were not then members of General Synod, the debate is well worth reading. It can be found at

www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/reports-of-proceedings/july-2010-group-of-sessions.aspx pages 150 - 168

Why do we not support the Archbishops' Amendment?

A. It proposes an apparently legally 'tidy' solution that is not an appropriate answer to a pastoral and theological problem.

- Only a few words in the Measure would be changed: but they are crucial words, for they are the words that would, in law, give all Diocesan bishops the retention of authority over their entire Dioceses. If these words were changed then the Church of England's traditional historic understanding of episcopacy within a Diocese would be undermined. A parish would then have two bishops with equal jurisdiction, only one of whom they would recognise and only one of whom would regard the other as a bishop.
- The Amendment would not satisfy the stated need for 'sacramental assurance', since co-ordinate jurisdiction would continue to be with a male bishop, not by law a male bishop who has not ordained women or been ordained by a woman.
- The wording is apparently simple but the consequences have not been examined. General Synod has not seen any work on how the Amendment would work in practice, or any exploration of unforeseen consequences. The debate in July 2010 illustrated how differently the two Archbishops understood the Amendment, as well as how Synod members struggled to interpret the wording.
- The parallel with Area bishops or army chaplaincy or prison chaplain falls down because of the fact that in this case one party does not recognise the other's orders and authority. In the offered parallels each party, and those amongst whom they minister, recognises the authority of both bishops (or priests), who can act

interchangeably. In this case they cannot. This changes the whole nature of the sharing, where one party has full recognition and the other does not.

- If the two Coordinate bishops in a Diocese were to disagree, whose authority would prevail? If the female (Diocesan) bishop's, then surely this is what is offered in the draft legislation; if the (Coordinate) male bishop's, then this is the same as statutory transfer, which General Synod resoundingly rejected.
- A Diocesan bishop is a sign and focus of unity across his or her Diocese. This would be sorely challenged when there would be parishes in almost every Diocese where there were overlapping jurisdictions and two Diocesan bishops, one of whom would not recognise the other.
- Provincial Episcopal Visitors minister to parishes under the delegated authority of Diocesan bishops who have ordained women, doing so because such parishes are unwilling to accept the ministry of their Diocesan bishops. If this has been acceptable for nearly twenty years, then why suddenly is such delegation not acceptable?
- What will happen when both Archbishops have consecrated women? Who will be left to consecrate the bishops who are not only against women's ordination but who believe that a male (arch)bishop is unacceptable and invalidates his orders when he ordains or consecrates a woman?
- Senior women clergy have repeatedly indicated that they would not be prepared to accept appointment as bishops under such amended legislation. Moreover, the Archbishops have never discussed their amendment with senior women clergy, whereas senior women have been well represented on the Revision Committee and the Code of Practice drafting group.

B. For all its (superficially appealing) suggestion of sharing authority and new models of episcopacy, this amendment is still based on the notion that women are a problem and need to be legislated for, to keep the problem from spreading to the whole church.

- It would put in law a question mark over the Episcopal orders and authority of female bishops. If a female Diocesan bishop must, in law, share her authority with a male bishop who does not recognise her orders, then her status and authority as a bishop would be called into question. This would perpetuate the sense that the Church is 'not quite sure' that women are fully human and of equal value in the sight of God.
- It might be good for the Church to consider different models of authority – but not to take that step simply because it is women who are consecrated.
- The co-ordinate arrangements would apply not only where there was a female bishop but in almost every other Diocese: where the Diocesan bishop supports the ministry of women and is prepared both to ordain and to participate in the consecration of

women. It is therefore legislation which is based around the idea of women as a problem . . .

- . . . unless it is possible to “pick your Bishop” on other theological grounds – eg interpretation of Scripture, issues re human sexuality – but who wants to go down that path? We would not even conceive of offering such a choice in relation to race or ethnicity.
- We seem to be losing sight, through trying desperately to accommodate a small minority, of the fact that the Church has decided that women should be ordained in all three orders. Being held by a majority doesn’t automatically make a viewpoint right, but this viewpoint has been very carefully discerned by the Church and should be implemented in a way that does not undermine its central aim.

C. The current draft legislation offers good provision to those opposed to women’s ordination as priest and bishops, but there are fears about what an extension of the current provision would create.

- Those with difficulties now have three specially consecrated suffragan bishops who act as Provincial Episcopal Visitors. When the Act of Synod is rescinded, the title of PEV will go but their Sees will not. Presumably they will then become suffragan bishops working as part of the Episcopal teams in Canterbury and York Dioceses, but will also be available to minister in parishes in other Dioceses under local Diocesan Schemes created in response to the Measure.
- If co-ordinate Bishops, like PEVs, work across a whole province, we are in danger of moving towards the “additional dioceses” model, with jurisdiction conferred directly by virtue of the Measure rather than by delegation from the Diocesan. This was clearly rejected by Synod and would undermine the aim of this legislation to enable people of differing views, all loyal Anglicans, to work together in the service of God and God’s people.

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