

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

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Anyone who liked liturgy would have loved Church of Ireland General Synod 2002. There were no less than nine liturgical Bills for consideration. These included traditional and modern forms of marriage service together with a form of prayer and dedication after a civil marriage. It was emphasised in the introduction to this latter Bill that the object was not to provide a service of blessing such as used to be suggested for divorced couples who used not to have access to the marriage service, but to deal with occasions where, for various reasons, couples would undergo a civil ceremony first. There were also amendments to the sentences of scripture, a traditional and modern form of burial and a traditional and modern form of baptism. Finally, the committee sponsoring the legislation sought and obtained leave to withdraw a Bill to include in the proposed new Prayer Book a Psalter in contemporary language. As the new Prayer Book had originally been conceived it would have contained two Psalters, one in the traditional form and one in modern form. However, the sponsoring committee, mindful, perhaps, of some criticism of the weight of the recent new Hymn Book, had begun to have second thoughts. The inclusion of two Psalters was likely to involve an extra 200 pages over and above a book containing only one. Accordingly, the Committee sought leave to withdraw the Bill, promising to substitute, instead of the originally planned traditional and modern Psalter, a single Psalter taken from *Common Worship—Services and Prayers for the Church of England*.

All the Bills which were proposed were passed with the necessary two-thirds majorities of both Orders subject to some comparatively minor amendments. An objection was raised to one form of service which had included among the readings passages from the non-canonical books. This, it was suggested, was contrary to Article 6 of the Thirty-Nine Articles which the Church of Ireland, according to its Constitution, receives and approves. It was further suggested that even to list such books under the same headings, or in the same line, as passages from the canonical books constituted an elevation in status. The Primate's Assessor advised that, while the relevant Article did provide that anything outside the canonical books was 'not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation', it did not seek to prohibit or even discourage readings from the non-canonical books. On the contrary it accepted such readings 'for example of life and instruction of manners'. Accordingly, he advised, the Constitution did not preclude the Synod from considering and prescribing the use of such readings in places it thought appropriate.

In addition to the liturgical Bills the Synod also considered a Bill to amend the Constitution in some minor respects, which it passed. It also considered

a Bill designed to change the number and ratio of representatives to the General Synod itself. In 2001 a Bill proposing a variety of amendments to the synodical structure including, inter alia, a reduction in the size of the Synod was comprehensively defeated. The Bill for consideration this year would have had the effect of enlarging the Synod. The Bill was defeated at its first reading. What Synod does not want is thus becoming clearer; what it does want is as obscure as before.

The Synod also considered a proposed Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland derived from discussions which have been going on between the two Churches and which have been reported to the Synod as they have progressed. The Covenant does not constitute a union or even a promise of union. It does constitute a commitment to commence a journey together which may, if God wills it, lead to union in the future. The Covenant was endorsed by the Synod. It goes before the Methodist Conference shortly.

As well as the nine liturgical Bills already described there were eleven liturgical Resolutions, all requiring a two-thirds majority of both Orders to achieve the equivalent of a first reading. These represent the last lap in the long drawn out process of completely revising the Prayer Book. All eleven Resolutions were passed and will lead to the introduction next year of Bills which, it is hoped, will enable the new Prayer Book to be published in 2004. The Bills for next year include a new form of Daily Prayer; a new form of Ministry to the Sick; a new Service for Ash Wednesday; the adoption of The Psalter from *Common Worship*; a new Ordinal; a revised Order for Confirmation and a form of Baptism in the context of Morning or Evening Prayer. The Resolutions also provide for the alteration of some texts to follow the English Language Liturgical Consultation version, subject to some amendment, for a revised collection of Prayers and Thanksgivings and for new Directions for Public Worship. Finally there is a proposed 'tidying-up Bill' to cover mistakes, inaccuracies, inconsistencies and infelicities which may have been found in the numerous Bills required by the entire process of liturgical revision. It has been a long haul. The Synod looks forward to its completion.