

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT

Richard Morgan

24 September 2020

I spent today at a day-only meeting of General Synod in Westminster. Because of the difficulties of all of us meeting in a confined space due to Covid-19 only a select few – a quorum from each House – were invited. 51 members of the House of Clergy; 51 members of the House of Laity; and 14 members from the House of Bishops. I was the only representative from the Diocese of Ely.

The main purpose of the day was to agree how to meet “virtually”. The Officers of General Synod decided to produce their own Measure called: ‘Draft General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure’.

This Measure makes provision for General Synod to meet and transact business remotely, in accordance with temporary special standing orders made for that purpose by the officers of the Synod.

Mr Geoffrey Tattersall QC, a retired judge and Diocesan Chancellor of Manchester and Carlisle, very ably steered the legislation through the Synod. An amendment proposed by Fr Paul Benfield (Blackburn), a barrister, was approved ‘That the officers of General Synod may exercise the power to make standing orders under this section only once, and they may not amend or revoke standing orders made under this section’.

Fr Thomas Seville CR (Religious Communities) – a former member of Little St Mary’s Cambridge – proposed a sunset clause. He reminded Synod that this Measure expires at the end of 30 November 2021 but that General Synod may resolve that it continue in force. Regrettably, there was not enough support for this amendment.

The Framers of this Measure very wisely, in my view, decided that this Measure would not include provision which would apply to business on:-

- a) a Measure, Canon or other provision touching any of the matters referred to in Article 7(1) of the Constitution.
- b) a Measure or Canon to which Article 8 of the Constitution applies by virtue of paragraph (1) of that Article, or
- c) a scheme to which Article 8 of the Constitution applies by virtue of paragraph (1) or (1A) of that Article.

Article 7 concerns doctrinal formulae or the services or ceremonies of the Church of England or the administration of the Sacraments or sacred rites thereof.

Article 8 is concerned with providing permanent changes in the Services of Baptism or Holy Communion or in the Ordinal.

Although there were those who wanted these included the will of the Synod threw these proposals out.

A recorded vote, taken in Houses, declared the Measure passed. Royal Assent is needed before the proposed November sessions.