

Minutes of

Nottingham South Deanery Synod

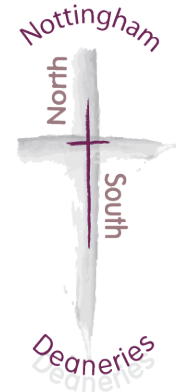
on Wednesday 25th May 2011 at 19.30

held at St John's, Carrington.

Present: 10 clerical and 29 lay members.

The meeting was chaired by Robert Cleave, Joint Lay Chair.

Apologies: 7 clerical and 17 lay members.



Gathering

The Revd Jonathan MacGillivray opened and welcomed everyone. A particular thank you was given to those members standing down, for their hard work and dedication to the role.

Opening Worship

Jonathan led us in worship, talking about the Venerable Bede.

Notices

- Deanery synod handbook

The handbook is available as a hard copy from the deanery office or can be downloaded from the deanery website.

- Deanery Leadership Team elections.

At the first meeting of the new triennium on October 6th, it will be necessary to elect a lay chair(s) and leadership team members. Deanery Synod Members were asked to think about whether they would like to stand for this position or to nominate someone else.

- Newsletter

A newsletter is available for each member and church. Please take spare newsletters for putting in your churches. If you would like further hard copies, please get in touch with the deanery administrator. It can also be downloaded from the deanery website.

Women in the episcopate –

Robert Cleave opened this discussion informing the group that in previous feedback two things had come through very strongly. The first was it had been asked that we meet more frequently as separate deaneries rather than together with Nottingham North; and secondly that members wanted to be talked at less and engage with substantive issues. Hence the discussion this evening.

This issue has now come down from diocesan synod, where at their next meeting there will be a formal vote taking place. As a deanery synod we haven't legally had to have a debate. We can't have a formal vote although a straw poll may happen at the end.

The approach is 'indaba' groups which come out of Africa; this is a format where groups involving those of differing views sit around and listen to each other and come to understand and respect each other's points of view.

These were used at the last Lambeth conference - representatives from a different background with strongly held views. The aim is to gain a different perspective from ours.

The groups were organised and initially a personal issue was shared among the groups to enable members to practise listening to each other.

We then re-assembled to listen to the three speakers:

- The Revd Richard Davey, Chaplain at Nottingham Trent University & Associate Priest at All Saints, St Mary & St Peter
- The Revd Andrew Waude, Nottingham St George and St Cyprian's.
- The Revd Ian Paul, Lecturer in New Testament and Hermeneutics, St John's Theological College.

It was emphasised that during our group sessions, it was important to listen to each other and gain an understanding of where others were coming from, rather than trying to impress upon them the rightness of an argument.

The Revd Richard Davey

Comes from the Liberal Catholic tradition – deeply liberal. He works in an interfaith context and spends a lot of time at the moment talking to Muslims. He had wrestled with what to say as he saw this as a non- issue. The God whom he worships is one who is accepting, inclusive and loving and to exclude anyone or in this case women does not reflect the God who he is passionate about and serves. Two main points that came to him; working in a secular environment, it becomes embarrassing having to defend the church – these young people have a deep hunger for spirituality but don't associate that with religion and this issue sums up the church for them.

The church to them is completely irrelevant not because they don't have faith but because it doesn't tap into where their spirituality is. Their horizons are much bigger than the church who can't agree whether women should be bishops and whether there should be a place for those who don't agree to go. So there is an embarrassment about having to defend a church who thinks this is an issue.

And secondly, from Richard's academic thinking, the phenomenology perspective, he mentioned Steiner's book 'Real Presence' which talks about the need for the sacred. There is too much second, third, fourth and fifthhand discourse in the world; we don't spend enough time with the prime, the original source. We bother about what the church says, what theologians say, rather than that authentic real experience of God that we met in our worship and as we walk through the world and see God in our neighbour and in our natural world.

It's damaging and a non issue because we have become too obsessed with our mission to the church in the world rather the mission of the world to the church. This excludes God in the 98% which is outside the church. Maybe we should be listening to those who are asking why we haven't got women bishops already.

The Revd Andrew Waude

Andrew opened by quoting from a speech President Obama had made that afternoon. "We do not define citizenship based on race or ethnicity. Being American or British is not about belonging to a certain group. It's about believing in a set of ideals, the rights of individuals and the rule of law. That is why we hold incredible diversity within our borders... yes, our diversity can lead to tension... but even as this can be difficult, we fundamentally recognise that our patchwork heritage is an enormous strength."

How much of that can you apply to the Church of England? Why do we Catholics in the COE have difficulties with the ordination of women? It is about sacramental assurance. We are not against women's ministry; we want to encourage it wherever possible. But women priests and bishops are an innovation unknown since the Apostles until now. We respect the pastoral and teaching ministry of our many women priests and laity but we simply don't see that they have the authority to act as priest and bishops in a church like ours, whose orders are those of the universal church not our own. This means that the sacraments they administer – Holy Communion, ordination, consecration are uncertain. We need the certainty Anglicans have always enjoyed.

Biblical teaching – we are not persuaded that the innovations are biblical. It is at the best a grey area, at worst a departure from the teaching of scripture. It skates over some very difficult biblical issues, not least headship, by favouring other texts. The proposals enforce conformity on an issue which cannot be proved from scripture.

It would mean more disunity. Both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches have regretted that it undoes so much patient work which tries to draw the church to fuller communion.

We may be a minority but our theological convictions should be respected just as other minorities in society are respected. Promises were made to that effect and they are not being kept. What about Anglican comprehensiveness. The glory of the Anglican church is that it is a broad church. We live with very different and contradictory views on almost everything. Should a proposal draw us away from the Anglican way because they don't respect our convictions. That's a dangerous precedent and something which should worry all Anglicans. Conformity is replacing comprehensiveness and it will destroy something essential in the church that we love.

It treats us as a minority to be catered for but not allow any theological recognition. We must be looked after by those who don't share our position, probably don't understand it, probably don't sympathise with it. Can you imagine such an arrangement being proposed for any other minority in society?

Rights of the laity – the draft measure deprives them of their existing rights currently enshrined in resolutions A & B. Arrangements will be wholly clericalised - laity will be disenfranchised.

Sexism - the proposals are deeply flawed because they are inherently sexist. They simply allow us to have a man instead of a woman. Our position is not anyone unless it is woman. This degrades us and our sisters in Christ. Our objection is not to gender per se but to the denial of our catholic order and apostolicity which it represents. So the male bishops which have embraced that denial would not be acceptable.

We are looking for equal treatment. The breaking of promises should be of concern for all Anglicans – once done, it will happen again.

The Manchester report spoke of uncertainty and disruption, it warned of it, and this will continue. We need to agree to live with the difference. Is the legislation good enough? Will it help us to grow together or will it perpetuate conflict and strife. We could live together in harmony given the space both sides need to flourish.

The Revd Ian Paul

There are a number of concerns that have influenced me:

First - Grove booklet. The literature on this issue is vast. I have spent a lot of time in discussion with people with whom I disagree and what this has taught me is that despite all the literature, there has been very little conversation and listening or understanding but a building of barricades and a withdrawal behind them. So this booklet aims to summarise the arguments.

We actually need conversation. I am coming from an evangelical perspective. I agree that we have got to go back to the original source, not what other people have said about the scripture. Being part of the reformed catholic church, we receive the traditions of the church in the light of how scripture would reform them and it is possible to live with what looks like innovation, if scripture says the tradition has drifted from the original source.

So looking at Genesis 1 where it says humanity is made in the image of God - male and female together. Genesis 2 – the striking language where the women is not subordinate but is equal to the male. Looking to the New Testament, a key principle comes from “We may not expound one part of scripture in a way repugnant to another.” This is where I would differ with other evangelicals who would traditionally look at texts from 1 Timothy 2 where Paul says, “I am not permitting a woman to usurp authority or exercise authority over a man”; or 1 Corinthians 14, “a woman should be silent.” The way these have been read are clearly repugnant to other parts of scripture and I don’t think that is good enough in the COE.

In Acts 18, we see Priscilla and Aquila who are the founders of the church in Ephesus; here we have Priscilla leading in an apostolic church, founding teaching ministry and it is unambiguous in the text.

In Romans 16 Junia, who with her husband is of great standing amongst the apostles. Bad things have been done to the text – the name was changed from a female name to a male name. We are not talking about innovation, we are talking about a genuine inclusive gender neutral pattern of apostolic ministry which Paul believed in and which was lost in subsequent centuries. As a member of a reformed catholic church, I want to hold the tradition accountable and the test of the tradition is ‘does it reflect the authority of scripture’ and in the end all tradition has to be accountable at the bar of scripture.

Headship is misread and it doesn't make sense in the way he frames his argument. Ephesians 5 is often quoted about marriage and mistranslated; there isn't an English translation which translates faithfully what Paul says.

Wives submission is to their own husbands. Paul never tells women to obey men. Children are to obey parents. All are filled with the Spirit and allows us to submit willingly to one another. The important thing is getting back to the original source and to be informed by scripture and be faithful to it.

Robert Cleave thanked all three of the speakers.

Thirty minutes of listening to each other in groups followed.

Robert took a bit of feedback where people expressed how helpful and worthwhile the session had been.

Closing

Jonathan closed in prayer.

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