



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Summer 2019

President : Right Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover

Chair : Robin Back, Norwich

Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

I was expecting to say that Brexit was behind us and that Parliament had given us an exemplar for dealing with intractable issues. Well as I write this, I can't. I have tried in this edition to bring a little diversity and so have included an article about the prevailing issues as well as some insights on Synod from differing perspectives - CEYC & Chaplaincy.

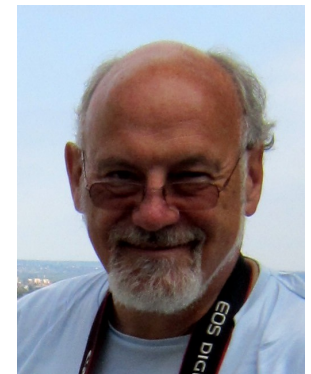
I am very grateful for the spot of light relief from my fellow member from Bath & Wells on the way to write and present religious (or maybe irreligious) matters on the boards.

We have all been impressed with the contributions from our CEYC participants over the years and they have stepped up to the mark more prominently in recent groups of sessions. I was immensely grateful to Sophie for her insights.

Michael Gisbourne and Christopher Cocksworth have given great personal articles about their respect current roles'

As always I remind everyone that the views and ideas that are expressed in any articles, including this editorial, are not specifically endorsed by the Open Synod Group.

I will not be at Synod in July as I have a higher level interrupt to celebrate my wife's significant birthday. I will miss the thrills and spills of debate and the fellowship with synod members. I look forward to seeing you all in February.



Chair's Reflections

Robin Back, Chair, Open Synod Group

As we look forward to another Group of Sessions in York, the OSG has arranged for another Quiz night on the Saturday evening (6th) in James Hall, benefitting Charity as yet undetermined. The location is a change from our usual venue but convenient to the James Kirk Centre. We look forward to welcoming all those who enjoy a little light relief after the rigours of Synod debates.

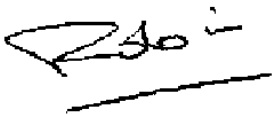
Whilst maintaining our non-partisan status, the OSG is not simply about organising fun events to relieve the seriousness of Synod business. Precisely because we are non-partisan, we offer a welcome to those elected to Synod who are not especially drawn to specific points on the spectrum of Anglican beliefs.

As we have said before, we believe this allows us to host events offering an open platform for conflicting views to be aired in a neutral forum. This is not debate as we have plenty of that in the chamber. Instead it allows for speakers to air views and respond to questions in a neutral environment and permits the audience to gain insights into alternative arguments. Our first attempt to do this in February had to be deferred but we are determined to bring this forward in the future.

At our AGM in February, we said a sad farewell to our President of many years, The Right Reverend Trevor Willmott, former Bishop of Dover, now retired and bishop for the Channel Islands, who stood down from General Synod on his retirement earlier this year. Together with my predecessors in this role, we have been very grateful for his support and advice over the years. Whilst we already miss him, we wish him and his wife, Margaret, a peaceful retirement.

Finally, I should thank our committee for all their efforts, especially Penny Allen, our Secretary, John Freeman, our Treasurer and Tim Hind, Editor of our Newsletter.

I look forward to seeing our readers at the July Group of Sessions.



Church of England Youth Council

Sophie Mitchell, CEYC Representative

I am one of three of the General Synod representatives for the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC).

Outside of Synod, I am a Theology and Sociology undergraduate at the University of Bristol. Though I have visited Synod before as an observer, February was the first time that I attended Synod as an elected member. It felt very special being in the chamber, whereas previously, as an observer, I had only looked down from the viewing gallery. When I was sent the Synod documents, I was overwhelmed both by the sheer number of documents that send to me and by the diversity of the topics to be debated. From Ministry amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to the Homeless Task Force, it is safe to say that the Church of England is aware of the issues that matter to us.

So much of my time at Synod was a learning curve. I learnt a huge amount about topics that I had never really thought of before. For example, I am no expert on ministry amongst council-housing estates. However, hearing the debate on this was fascinating, during which we heard several personal accounts of how their home churches and parishes were going about this ministry.

As representatives of CEYC, we do not have the ability to vote on the motions proposed. This makes our voice in speaking during debates so important. We hope to offer a new insight to the debates, by describing our experiences of being young people in the church today. As representatives of CEYC, we were accumulatively called to speak five times at Synod in February. One of my speeches was during the environment debate. In my speech, I spoke about the young people who were out on the streets during February 2019, protesting for the government to declare a 'climate emergency'.

I hope that this makes clear the extent that young people want to be involved in decisions about their future, whether in parliament or at Synod. Young people have rich experiences which must be heard in the debates we have at Synod. These experiences could be used to create meaningful and transformational change within the church. As representatives of CEYC, we hope to advocate for young people in the Church of England, and we hope that you want to listen.

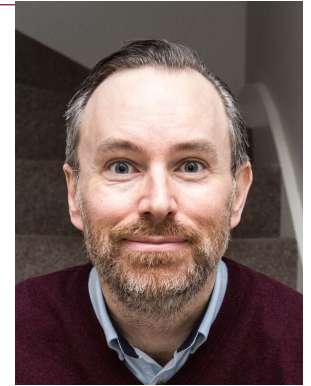


Religious Theatre

James Cary, Bath & Wells

Who killed Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170? You might know that it was four knights eager to please their king Henry II who had previously yelled “Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?” Naturally, the true story is more complicated.

This is a subject that I’ve been thinking about a lot in the last year, researching Becket for a new stage show called, unsurprisingly, *A Turbulent Priest*. I’ve written it as a comedy, partly because I’m a sitcom-writer by trade (I co-wrote the first couple of series of *Miranda* among other things). I don’t really know how to write anything else. If you can hear laughing, you know it’s working. Drama must be very hard. After all, a stunned silence sounds a lot like an awkward pause.



A Turbulent Priest is a comedy with plenty of jokes and comedy songs which have been written by James Sherwood. He has summed up the central relationship brilliantly in his song called ‘Best in Friends’ in which Henry and Becket sing together like Hope and Crosby on a Road movie, except it’s obvious to everyone except Henry that you can never be truly friends with an autocratic ruler. Especially one like Henry. Were they ever really friends?

It would be surprising to some that the show is a comedy, and perhaps more surprisingly still that the part of Thomas Becket is played by a woman. This is not a step towards pantomime, where the male hero like Peter Pan is often played by a woman. Nor is it virtue-signalling. In *A Turbulent Priest*, Becket represents the Church, the bride of Christ, and traditionally referred to as female. Previews has demonstrated that this move seems to work, along with the comic tone of the show. It does get more serious as the show progresses. The audience starts to lean in, curious to know what happens next, even though they know what’s coming.

When it does come, Becket’s death is not played for laughs, since it’s not a comic moment, but an heroic one. Becket may have been politically naïve or underestimated his former friend, the King, but he was prepared to pay the price for being the prophetic voice of Mother Church.

It’s a complicated story and the more I’ve read and researched, the less I feel I know for sure. But in a comedy or a drama, you need to pick one reason and stick to it. To find out my verdict, you’ll just have to come and see the show. It’s touring the UK this year. You can find exactly where and when at www.aturbulentpriest.com

A Chaplain's Perspective

Michael Gisbourne, Chaplain to Synod

LET US BLESS THE LORD

There was nothing in the role description for the General Synod Chaplain that looked too challenging. After all, with over 23 years experience of crafting and leading worship at parish, deanery and diocesan level I knew what I was doing.

However, turning up at the November 2015 Synod in Church House Westminster as Her Majesty the Queen inaugurated a new Synod took me to the limits of my comfort zone. As many people know, leading worship in front of your peers, some of whom have a greater experience than you, is not always an easy experience. However, I kept in mind and still do, these four years later, that my role as General Synod Chaplain, is to enable others to encounter God in worship, and that that worship should undergird the work of Synod.

Being the broad church, that it is, we all worship in different ways and have our own preferences when it comes to liturgy or music or style, but we all worship the God who is revealed in Jesus and lives in us through his Spirit. Not everyone will like every one of the acts of worship that have been led by a variety of members from each of the three houses, but they have been crafted in such a way as to help everyone to encounter God and some may have actually done that!

Yes, I am aware that when I begin each Synod with an opening act of worship that there are Bishops, Clergy and Lay people who could probably do a better job, but the task of Synod members is to transact the Synod's business. My task is to support that business, the debates, discussions and decisions, with prayer and worship. I have tried to do that with liturgies and hymns or songs that complement the Synodical business. Over the last four years we have had a Eucharist focusing on climate change and other environmental issues as well as morning and evening prayer that have supported the churches current Safeguarding conversations.

New initiatives have born fruit as well, with the Continuing Praying Presence supporting Synodical business as well as the moving of the time of the morning Eucharist during the York sessions. Having the daily Communion service beginning at 7 am rather than 7.30am has doubled the attendance to over 50!

What of the future? Well, my five-year term of office comes to a conclusion at the end of the Quinquennium next summer! Who knows what the future will bring..



Living in Love and Faith – Personal Reflection

Rt Rev Christopher Cocksworth, Coventry

Through LLF I am learning more about God, revealed in Jesus, manifested in the Spirit, that God is patient and kind. I'm learning about the Church and its people, that we are at our best when we are not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. I'm learning about myself, that it's no good trying to insist on my own way and it helps no one if I am irritable or resentful. I'm learning about how people, very different people, sometimes with very different ideas, work better together when they don't rejoice in wrong doing, or even in wrong thinking, but rejoice in the truth.

I'm learning through the demands of LLF, whether that's trying to keep the confidence of people across the church, engaging with other churches, other religions and secular agencies, or listening closely to the actual experience of people, sometimes very painful experience, or shaping the writing of a text by a diverse group of Christians who nevertheless hold a common faith, and who want to live, somehow, in love together, that we need to bear all things (pertaining to love), believe all things (truly consistent with the God of love), hope all things (about the capacity of divine love at work in the church and world) and endure all things (that serve that love, for the sake of which Christ laid down his life).

I'm learning that we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part but that when the complete comes, the partial will end; that we now see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face. I'm learning to pray, to pray that we will meet with Jesus – and there have been times when I think we have – to meet him face to face, here and now, the face in whom the face of God and the face of humanity are truly seen. The one who is complete and has come completely, and yet is still to come and to be seen completely.

As I'm learning to know others better, though still in part, I'm longing to know them more fully, and I'm yearning to be known by them – and to know myself – even as I am fully known in God.

I'm learning that faith, hope and love abide, these three; and that the greatest of these is love, because our faith is in the love of God and our hope is set on Christ.



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