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Proposers: Stephen Coleman and Damien Mason



Treasures new and old

Colleagues in the Diocese were kind enough to elect me to General Synod in 2015, and I hope they might put me back on this time, after five years away. I was elected as a Church Commissioner nearly ten years ago and re-elected, though am now about to be guillotined, as it were. The substantial majority of that work has not divided along 'party' lines, but there have been times when I have felt obliged to speak out on controversial subjects, even when that has left me somewhat lonely! I hope it is also true to say that I made a good contribution on the floor of General Synod when I was a Proctor—though only speaking when I had something meaningful to say, I hope!—and I contributed to the drafting of legislation through the relevant steering and revision committees, and through the tabling of amendments and so on. I have recently become Synodical Secretary for the Province of Canterbury, so I have had a role in the Convocation, which sort of makes me Synod 'staff', although in that context I don't have the right to speak or vote.

Be a shepherd not a wolf

I have always tried to contribute to the life of the diocese and wider Church of England, on synods and boards of education and bishops' councils and so on, but (and?) nothing has

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ever shaken my belief that there is no substitute for the parish in the life of the Church. The ecclesiology of episcopacy and the diocese is important, but at the practical level, what matters most is the place where the Body of Christ meets, in its parish churches. As a Commissioner I have seen ‘pastoral schemes’ brought by dioceses (mercifully not ours!) which seem bound to undermine pastoral ministry by creating vast new units. Part of that is a vocations problem, of course, but I am always suspicious that there is a desire for greater control which can only militate against what we clergy were ordained to do. If only bishops had any memory of the Prayer Book Ordinal! The new Mission and Pastoral Measure is at its revision stage, and (having had some involvement in that at Commissioners level) I would hope to contribute as a member Synod to this next part of the process.

Looking ahead

The end of Living in Love and Faith has been peculiarly unsatisfactory, with the ‘blood-letting’ debate in February leaving nobody especially happy, and we will now have to watch carefully as the new Work Group and Consultative Group take up their burden. I do feel that it ought to be possible to keep in the fold people with widely differing views on these matters, not least because we have managed it with the question of Holy Order.

There is also the ongoing question of new safeguarding arrangements, and we will have to put in the hard graft that is necessary to get that right.

The Clergy Conduct Measure is of interest to me, having written on its predecessor legislation and sat on the Clergy Discipline Commission for a time. It has recently completed its passage through parliament and received the Royal Assent; now the Synod needs to keep a close watch on its implementation. And in the light of recent events, it is also important that we get our relationship with the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament securely back on track after the debacle over the National Church Governance Measure.

Other stuff I want to get stuck into includes the significance of Church Schools, clergy retirement provision, vocations and the importance of proper theological training of ordinands and curates, and the rights of private patrons.

Looking for the City that is to come

To my surprise, I find that I have been ordained for quite a long time now—my ordination to the priesthood was thirty year ago—and I have been an incumbent for twenty-five. I do have some significant experience to offer, and some theological clout to bring to the table. (Still working on that doctorate...!) I can also bring to debates and legislative scrutiny some ‘extra-parochial’ skills both educational and legal (I qualified as a barrister once-upon-a-time), and many years’ experience of diocesan bodies. For pleasure, I play the piano and am a bit of a cricket fan. I have a cat called Bella and a collection of Wisdens.

