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News Focus - C of E Clergy reject Bishops' policy line on sexuality

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Church of England clergy issue shock rebuke to Bishops' conservative view on sexuality

The Church of England's clergy have issued an extraordinary challenge to its conservative line on marriage by throwing out a bishops' report on sexuality, Harry Farley, writes in Christian Today.

In a major revolt against the CofE's hierarchy, members of the Church's General Synod rejected a report by top bishops that said there was 'little support' for changing the view that marriage was between one man and one woman.

The shock result plunges the Church into confusion on its stance on marriage with the bishops' report barred from being discussed until the end of this synod in 2020.

Although a majority of members overall voted in favour, a move by campaigners against the report forced the synod to split into its three separate houses – the laity, the

clergy and the bishops – with all three needing a majority for it to pass.

But the clergy voted by 100 to 93 against, in a rebuke to the bishops' authority.

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t is unprecedented that a 'take note' motion, usually passed on the nod, should fail and highlights the tide of anger from all sides within the Church over the bishops' report.

Daily Telegraph Lead story **Church of England clears way for same sex marriage**

Vote against bishops' report that supported ban is hailed as a victory by liberal clergy, writes Olivia Rudgard

Church of England clergy appeared to signal support for gay marriage last night after they rejected a bishops' report which said that only a man and woman could marry in church.

The report recommended that the bar on same-sex church marriages continue but that a more welcoming attitude towards homosexuals should be shown by congregations.

However, the motion was rejected by clergy at the General Synod who voted 100 to 93 against.

Last night, sources said they believed the recommendation had been rejected by the more liberal members of the clergy who thought the Church should ultimately drop its opposition to gay marriage. Campaigners for gay marriage welcomed the decision as a “victory for love and equality”.

After the vote, Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich, who led the group that produced the report, said: “We have listened to those who have spoken, and those others who have made contributions to us directly.

“Our ongoing discussions will be informed by what members of Synod and the wider Church have said as a result of this report.”

“I think what was clear from the debate was that the report tries to straddle positions that cannot be reconciled”

The decision exposes deep divisions within the Anglican Church over homosexuality and is embarrassing for the House of Bishops as authors of the report. In the vote, which was split between the Church’s three houses – bishops, clergy, and laity – the clergy were the only house not to “take note” of, or accept, the report, which meant it was rejected. There were two abstentions within the clergy and one bishop

voted not to take note. Laity voted to take note by 106 to 83, with four abstentions.

The report was strongly criticised during a two-hour debate yesterday afternoon. Members said it was “grudging and condescending”, “divorced from reality” and made the Church look “unkind” and homophobic.

The report had recommended the Church of England continue to consider marriage as “a union, permanent and lifelong, of one man with one woman”.

Before the vote, the Most Rev Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, urged members to “take note” of the motion but promised that bishops would in future “do better”, adding: “We could hardly fail to do so, in the light of what has been said this afternoon.”

The vote was welcomed as a symbolic victory by campaigners. Jayne Ozanne, a campaigner for LGBT rights within the Church, said she was “thrilled” with the result.

But conservative members also said they voted against the report, which would have allowed the Church “maximum freedom” to support gay couples

and clergy. Andrea Minichiello Williams, director of lobby group Christian Concern, said: “I think what was clear from the debate was that the report tries to straddle positions that cannot be reconciled. I voted against the report as well. This shouldn’t be read as a victory for the LGBT activists within the Church.”

The report, released last month after a three-year consultation process, was strongly opposed by liberal members of the Church of England’s governing body, who said it discriminated against gay people and excused homophobia.

Earlier, two bishops who helped write the report apologised for its content and tone but urged members not to reject it. Bishop Graham insisted that lesbian and gay people already had an “honoured place” in the Church.

Peter Tatchell was among LGBT campaigners protesting against the report

Peter Tatchell who has campaigned against Church homophobia for 50 years said: “This vote to, in effect, reject the bishops’ report is a victory for love and equality. It is the biggest defeat for the Anglican leadership in many decades. Synod refused to endorse the anti-LGBT exclusion and

discrimination enshrined in the bishops' recommendations."

The voting

The General Synod of the Church of England has voted "not to take note" of a Report by the House of Bishops following a debate on the report earlier today on Marriage and Same Sex Relationships.

A take note debate is a neutral motion which allows Synod to discuss the content and recommendations contained in a report without committing the Synod to the formal acceptance of any matter.

The vote required simple majorities in each of the three Synodical Houses. A total of 242 people voted in favour of the report 184 against and 6 abstentions - with a majority of Synod members voting to "take note" of the report. However the report failed to obtain a simple majority in the House of Clergy.

The House of Bishops voted 43 in favour and 1 against.

The House of Clergy voted 93 in favour and 100 against with 2 abstentions.

The House of Laity voted 106 in favour and 83 against with 4 abstentions.

With the take note motion now rejected, the Bishops of the Church of England will reflect on the views expressed at the General Synod. The diversity of opinion and strong views expressed, will need to be taken account by the Bishops in their consideration of the discussion going forward.

Statement by Archbishop of Canterbury after vote

“No person is a problem, or an issue. People are made in the image of God. All of us, without exception, are loved and called in Christ. There are no ‘problems’, there are simply people.

How we deal with the real and profound disagreement – put so passionately and so clearly by many at the Church of England’s General Synod debate on marriage and same-sex relationships today – is the challenge we face as people who all belong to Christ.

To deal with that disagreement, to find ways forward, we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. This must be founded in

scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual.

We need to work together – not just the bishops but the whole Church, not excluding anyone – to move forward with confidence.

The vote today is not the end of the story, nor was it intended to be. As bishops we will think again and go on thinking, and we will seek to do better. We could hardly fail to do so in the light of what was said this afternoon.

Media coverage with web links

Widespread coverage after the General Synod voted yesterday evening not to ‘take note’ of a report by the House of Bishops on marriage and same sex relationships. The vote required simple majorities in each of the three Houses of the General Synod. Although a majority of Synod members voted to take note of the report, it failed to gain a simple majority in the House of Clergy. The BBC report contains a Q and A on the issues and an analysis by BBC Religious Affairs correspondent Martin Bashir. The Times

publishes a sketch and a leading article on the vote (see below) and its implications.

Synod rebuff for Bishops' report on sexuality

Church Times

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/17-february/news/uk/synod-rebuff-for-bishops-report-on-sexuality>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38989304>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38982013>

<http://www.itv.com/news/2017-02-15/church-of-england-votes-against-archbishop-endorsed-marriage-report/>

<https://www.channel4.com/news/church-debates-same-sex-marriage>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/15/church-of-england-in-turmoil-as-synod-rejects-report-on-same-sex-relationships>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/15/church-england-votes-reject-controversial-gay-marriage-report/>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/church-rejects-bishops-attempt-at-reconciliation-on-gay-marriage-srfqwhb2v>

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4229328/Archbishop-Canterbury-s-fails-end-gay-marriage-rift.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/same-sex-marriage-church-of-england-anglican-general-synod-man-woman-report-lgbt-rights-gay-clergy-a7582611.html>

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-religion-britain-anglicans-idUKKBN15U2L9>

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/17-february/news/uk/synod-rebuff-for-bishops-report-on-sexuality>

Media Centre Presentations from the Bishop of Norwich and the Bishop of Willesden

In a presentation to the General Synod ahead of small group work on the House of Bishops Report, Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich

charted the recent history of the Church of England on issues of sexuality.

Beginning with the Church's support of the Wolfenden Report and the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality – led by the then Archbishop of Canterbury – in 1957 through to the criticism of General Synod in November 1987 by popular media for being “too liberal” after passing a motion which restated the Church's traditional teaching.

Bishop Graham James brought the recent history up to date noting “the tension which can exist between our determination to uphold firmly the teaching on marriage and sexual relationships as currently expressed in our Canons, and the commitment to affirm the place of LGBTI people within the Church, and, as paragraph 34 of the report says, to enable their voices to be heard.”

In his presentation the Bishop of Norwich also noted he had been involved in discussing same sex relationships for over forty years of ordained ministry: “As a curate in the late 1970s I recall leading a deanery synod discussion on the Gloucester Report on homosexual relationships. No one else was willing to do it. Little did I think

that almost forty years later I'd be standing before the General Synod presenting another report on the same subject. It is a very provisional report, as it says of itself. Like others which have gone before it, it has not received a rapturous reception in all quarters, and I regret any pain or anger it may have caused."

Referring to the House of Bishop's report itself, Bishop Graham said:

"I would be misleading you if I did not confess to being conflicted in presenting this report but in that I think I am far from alone among the bishops and in the wider Church of England.....Our own history in dealing with these matters also explains why people on all sides of the debate rarely find themselves satisfied."

In his speech ahead of the group work the Bishop of Willesden, Pete Broadbent, also commented on the Report and its reception on social and wider media.

Gafcom response to lobby group's paper

Prior to the Synod debate GAFCON UK welcomed the publication of the [OneBodyOneFaith statement "A time to build"](#).

Gascon stated that the statement is admirably clear in its wholesale abandonment of any pretence that OneBodyOneFaith has any respect for Biblical authority or any interest in the wellbeing of global Anglicanism.

The statement continues - "While "A time to build" suggests that it seeks "theological diversity" it in fact requires that the whole Church worldwide submit to a view that God has not spoken clearly in his Word about the nature of humanity and human sexuality.

"The authors of the statement suggest that they are wiser than 4,000 years of Biblical revelation, 2,000 years of Christian theology and the overwhelming majority of Christians down the ages and around the world.

"We note with a degree of amazement that OneBodyOneFaith's attempt to discredit GAFCON, which represents the majority of the world's Anglicans, relies entirely on an ad hominem attack which entirely misrepresents the position of a Primate whom the authors have never had the pleasure of meeting. We trust that

the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion will use his comments to General Synod tomorrow to distance himself from the manifest nonsense asserted by OBOF concerning Archbishop Okoh, Primate of Nigeria.”

Survey finds 50 per cent of Anglicans believe that same sex relationships are 'not wrong at all'

Ahead of the Church of England General Synod’s debate on the issue of gay marriage (15 February 2017), new data reveals that 50 per cent of Anglicans believe that same sex relationships are 'not wrong at all'.

The findings, which come from NatCen’s British Social Attitudes survey, show that Anglican opinions towards same sex relationships have been softening over time but acceptance is highest (73 per cent) among those with no religion. The lowest levels of acceptance of same sex relationships come from those belonging to non-Christian religions: 31 per cent of this group say that these relationships are not wrong at all.

Meanwhile, 17 per cent of Anglicans think that same sex relationships are 'always wrong', the lowest level since records began in 1983 when 51 per cent were of this view. In 2015 six per cent of those with no religion felt this way.

When it comes to the key issue of same-sex marriage, an earlier British Social Attitudes survey from 2014 showed that just under half (47 per cent) of Anglicans agreed or strongly agreed that gay and lesbian people should have the right to marry. This figure was 60 per cent among the public as a whole and 73 per cent among those with no religion.

Although the proportion opposing this view was smaller, (26 per cent of Anglicans disagreed or strongly disagreed with same sex marriage), there was still a significant proportion (20 per cent) that neither agreed nor disagreed that gay and lesbian people should be able to marry.

* The 2015 British Social Attitudes survey consisted of 4,328 interviews with a representative, random sample of adults in Britain with a response rate of 51 per cent. Interviewing was carried out between 4 July and 2 November 2015.

* The 2014 survey consisted of 2,878 interviews with a representative, random sample of adults in Britain. Interviewing was mainly carried out between August and October 2014, with a small number of interviews taking place in November 2014.

* NatCen Social Research, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better-informed society through high quality social research [http://
www.natcen.ac.uk/](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/)