

DIOCESAN SYNOD – 18th FEBRUARY

THE ANGLICAN COVENANT

Canon David Jennings, Canon Theologian, Leicester Cathedral

Mr Chairman, I have read all the papers, as you suggested. The one by Peter Doll is one of the worst. It is full of irrelevant historical stereotypes and non-sequiturs. Why didn't he say all these things 25 years ago, if he felt they were true? The paper by Paul Avis is wrong: there is no contradiction between autonomy and catholicism.

1. Let's be honest about the covenant. If it hadn't been for the election of Gene Robinson, an openly gay and partnered priest, as Bishop of New Hampshire in the USA, and the provision of services of blessing for same sex partners in the diocese of New Westminster in Canada, we would not be having this debate now. Whatever anyone says to the contrary it is about sex, and gay relationships in particular. In this respect it is an institutional attack on gay Christians being treated equally in the life of the Church. We ought to be able to deal with these matters apart from the provision before us. We ought also to grow up and grow out of our obsession with gay relationships, rather like the Church has historically grown out of many other supposed challenging issues. In yesterday's Church Times, Giles Fraser, writing in support of disposing the covenant, suggests that 'Reconciliation comes when those divided by differences learn to see Christ at work in each other. Mostly, this is achieved through patient friendship and listening'.
2. My concern is not just to do with this reality, as important as it is for gay people, but other and further implications. There is the very real possibility that other matters will be sucked into the covenant vortex, such as, for example, liberal explorations of faith. Me, for example! At the end of December, someone from Australia, possibly the diocese of Sydney, and who signed himself 'In God' accused me of being a heretic, a blasphemer and a liar. On 30th December he wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and I quote: *'Dear Archbishop, I am writing to you to request that you stand down and defrock Canon David Jennings. The man is a heretic and cannot possibly be allowed to be a member of the clergy. He states openly that he does not believe in creationism. He believes instead in the nonsense that is evolution.'* I immediately wrote to Bishop Tim and asked if he wanted my head on a platter, and to which I have received no reply! There is a real risk that the covenant process will be used against

more free-thinking Christians. Also, given the diocese of Sydney's rejection of the covenant, it will not placate those who don't want to be placated. The covenant is becoming increasingly irrelevant and unnecessary.

3. Let me affirm that if Churches such as Nigeria, Uganda, or wherever, and dioceses such as Sydney, or wherever, want not to appoint gay bishops, or provide services of blessings for gay couples, or reject liberal thinkers like me, then fine. No-one ought to compel them to act in any other way than in accordance with their own conscience or principles. However, neither should they impose their will through a quasi-legalistic and judicial process upon other provinces who wish to move in a different direction. Such recognition of diversity and mutual respect has always been a defining feature and principle of Anglicanism, not least through provincial autonomy, which hasn't been questioned or challenged from a theological or ecclesiological, let alone catholic, perspective until New Hampshire and New Westminster.
4. I would urge rejection of the motion. To date 5 C of E diocese have voted in favour and 6 against, I would ask Leicester to make the score it 7/5!