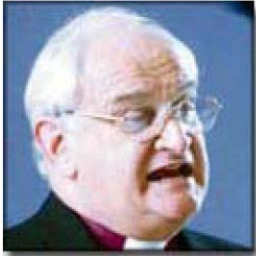




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Church of Ireland Synod bans Union Jack



Archbishop Eames—leading his church to Rome

The Church of Ireland Synod, which recently met in Dublin, voted overwhelmingly to stop the flying of the Union Flag on its churches in Northern Ireland, in order to avoid giving offence to Roman Catholics. In a strong reaffirmation of its commitment to ecumenism, the synod also warned against negative statements towards other Christians, a reference to Romanism, and said it sought the "visible unity" of the Church. As well as lowering the Union Jack, the Church of Ireland is preparing to lower forever the doctrinal standard the church has flown since the Reformation --the 39 Articles of Religion. The removal of the Articles, with their strong denunciations of Rome's errors, will prepare the way to full reunion

between the Church of Ireland and the Church of Rome. The recently published document by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission clearly indicates that union between Anglicanism and Rome is very close. The Church of Ireland has played a vital role in promoting this union. Bishop McAdoo of the C of I was the first joint-chairman of the Commission in 1968. The removal of the 39 Articles must take place before Rome would countenance any union. A resolution passed by the synod said that "formularies" such as the 39 Articles "should not be seen as representing the spirit of this Church today." It is clear that the Articles have already been abandoned in spirit if not in the letter.

The synod also voted overwhelmingly to urge the Drumcree church vestry to withdraw its 190-year-old standing invitation to Drumcree Orange Lodge, if they fail to agree to respect the church sanctity and property. They thus lay the blame for all the thuggery and riot, perpetrated by Republicans on the Garvaghey Road in Portadown, upon the Orange Lodge which is refused the right to march the public highway to a church service. After a 90-minute debate, the Drumcree motion was passed by a huge majority of the clergy and laity, despite an appeal from Drumcree rector, Rev John Pickering, for the synod to oppose the motion. All ten Bishops supported the motions. East Londonderry MP William Ross, a lay member from Derry and Raphoe, attacked the willingness to believe that residents' associations opposed to Orange parades genuinely sought accommodation, when evidence pointed to the deliberate creation of confrontation with the intent to provoke retaliation.

CHURCH HAS CHANGED

Rev Alan Harper, chairman of the sectarianism sub-committee, which drew up the motions after two years of work, said the Drumcree situation was a serious and dangerous scandal. The report of his sub-committee set out where the C of I parted company with the official position of the Orange Order and acknowledged that over the last 200 years it was the Church which had changed, particularly in its relationship with the Roman Catholic church. Rev Eric Culbertson, an Order chaplain from Armagh, said he had been besieged with complaints, and the removal of flags would be "gravely damaging". Orangemen were the



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"backbone" of the Church of Ireland in the North and the flag stood for the survival of the Protestant community through the IRA bombs of the Troubles.

RECTOR SET TO DEFY CHURCH

Drumcree rector, Rev John Pickering and his Select Vestry seemed to be on a collision course with the Church of Ireland over the Drumcree march. The beleaguered minister indicated he would defy the Synod, the Church's main policy-making body, over its request to withdraw the historic invitation to the Portadown lodge. "As far as I am concerned, I will not prevent anyone from attending a service and that is the view of the Vestry as well," he said after the votes in Dublin.

COLLUSION

It is now up to Rev Pickering and his Vestry, some of whom are Orange Order members, to decide whether to withdraw the invitation to the Portadown lodge but it was not clear today what sanction could be taken if they oppose the authority of synod. A church spokesman said it was recognised that Mr Pickering and the Vestry could be on a collision course with the rest of the Church.

Rev Michael Burrows, a country rector from west Cork, said the reality was that the "Drumcree tragedy" had damaged the mission, witness and credibility of the Church in the South "in a manner such as I had not previously witnessed in my lifetime". What has really damaged the Church of Ireland, North and South, has been its rejection of the Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ with its message of salvation by grace through faith. Forsaking God's truth, it has gone a whoring after the Church of Rome. Mixed marriages, sanctioned by the apostate clerics, have emptied the pews and doomed the denomination to extinction.

One has to ask why anyone glorying in their Protestantism would wish to march to a Church of Ireland church. There is no more apostate body in Ireland. The decisions taken at the 1999 Synod have clearly sent out a message that the Church of Ireland wishes to move closer to Rome and would rid itself of the last vestiges of Protestantism.

While there is a principle of freedom to march the public highway to be considered and contended for in the Drumcree controversy, there is also the command of the Word of God to be obeyed. "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues", Revelation 18:4. That word should be given over-ruling priority in all our deliberations. The failures that have marked the cause of Ulster over the last 30 years can all be traced to an ignoring of God's commands. The turning of the tide in the affairs of the Province must begin with obedience of the Bible.