

PRIMUS' CHARGE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2011

If you haven't been to Iona, you should go. It is part of our heritage in faith. And when you go, take time to go to Staffa - about seven miles away - and look back. Columba's island becomes a low-lying smudge in the middle distance – the Abbey standing up at its edge.-simultaneously the edge of the world and the centre of the world.

Jesus tells the disciples to be girded for action, to live the life of Christ, to prepare for heaven. That's what the Celtic church was good at - it's what George MacLeod meant when he described Iona as a 'thin place'.

On St Columba's Day, we think of that strand of our faith story which is rooted in the Celtic tradition - rooted in its spirituality and its energy for mission.

And there are others. During the year, I found myself in St Giles Cathedral with the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Cardinal at the renewal of baptismal vows as we marked the 450th Anniversary of the Scottish Reformation. That too is part of our heritage and we are shaped by it. For example, we see ourselves as a church of thoughtful, thought-provoking and incisive scriptural preaching.

Two weeks ago, I was in America. I found myself living within that strand of our heritage which is rooted in Samuel Seabury, first bishop of the Anglican Church in the United States of America. That history is the root of our deeply felt Anglicanism. It places us at the centre of what I believe must be the growing search for a post-colonial Anglican Communion.

As if all of that were not enough, I cannot fail to mention the changing times in which we live in Scotland. As churches, we should have no interest in flags or jurisdiction. But we are being called to play our part with our ecumenical and inter-faith partners in shaping whatever new national identity will emerge from the current debate. We should respond warmly and positively to that opportunity.

I have hardly made a start in setting out the strands of our history and I have not mentioned some of the most obvious ones. But I hope I have done enough to remind us that the times are changing around us. We need to draw on all the strands which have enriched our past and made us what we are in the present if we are to respond to the challenges and opportunities which face us.

A Whole Church Mission and Ministry Policy invites us to consider how we as a church will live the gospel in our times, and address the society in which we are placed. We have sometimes reached out with passion for things which we thought might answer most if not all of the questions. This new policy - and it is work in progress - invites a more measured – more holistic – more strategic response to the life of our church. It invites us to live out those strands of our tradition which I mentioned a moment ago. But there is also a question of mood. I sometimes say that we are a 'loaves and fishes' church - people who do miracles with tiny resources. In the recent training programme which I undertook with the bishops of the Episcopal Church in America, one of the characteristics identified for a church in mission is a 'death-defying joy'. Easter people who know death and yet address the world with joy. I think that this means that we are very realistic about our life - and yet bring to our mission buoyancy, resilience, energy and the joy which enables others to recognise the attractiveness of the God we worship and proclaim.

It has been a great privilege for me - as a representative of this church - to begin to experience the life of the wider Anglican Communion. I have seen enough to help me to understand the challenge of living with and being enriched by diversity. And I know that the same challenge and prize faces us within our own and every other Province. We owe it to our internal diversity that we should give measured and serious consideration to the Anglican Covenant. We shall use Indaba discussion which has become the way in which the Anglican Communion structures discussion across difference. We prize our Anglicanism – we have a slight feeling of ourselves as the midwives of the Anglican Communion as we know it. The discussion about the Covenant - whether we ultimately adopt it or whether we do not - is about our part in bringing to birth a new expression of the Anglican Communion.

This is an important Synod and I am looking forward to it. To discuss our mission and to explore the shape of our future relationship with the world church - that's an appropriate pairing for a church which offers itself to be the instrument of God's purposes in this time and this place. As we reflect on that calling on St Columba's day, may we bring to the task that richness of spirituality and missional energy which is the gift of the Celtic Church to us

*The Most Rev David Chillingworth
Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld & Dunblane and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church*