

Third Day

Thursday 16 November 2000

THE CHAIR *Mrs Margaret Swinson (Liverpool)* took the Chair at 9.45 a.m.

Revd George Kovoov (Birmingham) led the Synod in prayer.

Legislative Business

Draft Synodical Government (Amendment) Measure
(GS 1364A)

Measure for Revision

Report by the Revision Committee (GS 1364Y)

(Resumed debate)

The Chairman: We have reached Item 522 on the sixth notice paper. It was moved yesterday by Mrs Granger on behalf of the steering committee, Ms Humphreys made a speech, and at that point we broke for lunch. I will ask Mrs Granger just to open the subject up for us again because I think that that will lead to a more informed morning, and although I hope that she will not need it I will allow her the maximum of five minutes.

Mrs Penny Granger: The object of this paragraph is to provide for a period of six months between becoming a member of an electoral roll of a parish and being eligible to stand for election to that parish's PCC. It is always difficult to resume a debate from cold so, in summarizing where we got to yesterday for the benefit of members who were not in the chamber, I hope to summarize fairly the points that Ms Humphreys made in her speech.

She began by saying that the requirement for PCC membership of actual communicant status provides adequate evidence of commitment beyond being on the electoral roll, which does not require that you be an actual communicant member of the Church of England. Her second point related to the need to respond to the enthusiasm of new members of the church. She also drew a parallel with the position of a new vicar who comes in to lead the PCC absolutely from cold. She also spoke about people who are marginalized and alleged that this position was a cover-up, excluding people who are 'difficult'.

I think that that is the substance of where we got to, Madam Chairman. I shall not reply to these points now but later on in the debate.

Mrs Viviane Hall (Oxford): It is very difficult to reply to the last speech which was made as long as 24 hours ago, but I want to vote for this clause as it stands. I speak as a clergy spouse of 40 years' standing and 21 in parochial ministry. I have never been happy with the idea of husband and wife being on the PCC, whether they be clergy or lay. I do not see why there should be an exception for clergy wives; this is one point that Ms Humphreys made and I am not sure whether Mrs Granger touched on that. You are in a 'no win' situation. You have come from a parish where you have known the parish and have known and been known by the people. You come into a new parish. At that stage you know neither the parish nor the people. What right have you to assume that you might be entitled to go straight on to the PCC? As I said, it is a 'no win' situation: if you agree with your husband, well, 'she would, wouldn't she?', and if you disagree with him, 'not much loyalty there'.

Being on the PCC is a privilege. Clergy may not feel that but I hope that laypeople do, and I do not think that we can assume that privilege when we first move into a parish.

Having said that, I will admit that I was on the PCC for two years in the parish but that was purely because, in the run-up to the vote on the ordination of women, it was suggested, 'If you want to do something about it, get on your deanery synod so you have a vote.' So I did, and I had my vote, and I had two very uncomfortable years on the PCC. Please may we keep this clause as it is?

Ms Jacqueline Humphreys (Bristol): On a point of information, Madam Chairman. Just to clarify, I did not say that there should be an exception for clergy spouses; I merely drew to the attention of Synod the fact that clergy spouses were one of a group of people who would be automatically excluded by the operation of this, even if they had the popular support of their parish.

Dr Carole Cull (Oxford): I wish to support Mrs Granger and the provision in paragraph 2 here because I believe that it should be taken in the context of the whole of the Church Representation Rules. Yesterday I was moved to respond in a debate, for the first time, I think, in 15 years of synodical life actually to leap to my feet and answer something, because we were talking about subsidiarity. I believe that the Church Representation Rules make sufficient provision whereby, if a PCC and a parish have a particular instance of an individual who would be right on their PCC and who is caught by the six-month rule, the PCC can co-opt, and that is pointed out in the revision committee's report on page 4. That provision allowing the PCC to co-opt is exactly what subsidiarity is about: the rules give the parish the opportunity to take a decision which is right for their parish but on the whole the provision for six months' waiting is right for the Church in general. I believe that that is right and I want to encourage Synod to agree to this particular part of the Measure.

Mrs Penny Granger, in reply: I would like to thank the Synod, particularly for that support from the diocese of Oxford. Replying quickly to Ms Humphreys's points and things that have not been picked up by Mrs Hall and Dr Cull, and taking, first of all,

the actual communicant status provision, I would like to remind Synod that if you are a communicant member you are a communicant member of the Church of England, not in a particular parish, so each of your three times a year can, if you want, be in a different church; I do not think that that necessarily points to commitment. On the enthusiasm point, yes, of course, but, as we said in paragraph 8 of the revision committee's report, PCC membership is only one way of serving the Church and channelling that enthusiasm. Thank heavens we have people in our churches who are interested in other things apart from being on the PCC. Six months seems to be a good period of time for both sides to get to know each other. We ourselves are having hustings tonight for the various offices of this Synod. This is a way of getting to know each other and to find out from both sides what we are up to. The vicar is in a different position, one of leadership. If he does not want to chair the PCC right from the start, he can always get his vice-chairman to do it; after all, the vice-chairman will have been doing it in the vacancy.

Ms Humphreys also spoke about people who are marginalized, and mentioned the business about people who were difficult being excluded. I would like to ask members of the Synod: since when did any synodical body exclude people who are difficult? Dr Cull has already pointed out that the PCC can co-opt; it is in the revision committee's report and this is the route we prefer for people whom we really need on the PCC and who cannot wait six months.

As I said yesterday, we believe that the principle of building in a period of commitment and integration is a good principle. I would add, after tea-room conversations yesterday, an assurance to members of Synod that this does not of course affect ex-officio members.

I urge Synod to support the motion that paragraph 2 of the Schedule stand part of the Measure.

The motion was put and carried.

Paragraphs 3 to 7

Mrs Penny Granger: I beg to move:

'That paragraphs 3 to 7 of the Schedule stand part of the Measure.'

The motion was put and carried.

Paragraph 8

Dr Carole Cull (Oxford): I beg to move as an amendment:

'In paragraph 8(a) *leave out* all words after "following sub-paragraph" and *insert* –

- “(a) by the chairman of the council if he is present;
- (b) subject to paragraph (c) below, if the chairman of the council is not present, by the vice-chairman of the council if he is present;
- (c) by a clerk in Holy Orders (not being the minister as defined in rule 54) licensed to or with permission to officiate in the parish duly authorized by the bishop with the clerk’s agreement, following a joint application by the minister of the parish and the council or, if the benefice is vacant, by the council for the purposes of this sub-paragraph.”.

Yet again the vagaries of the synodical numbering system have given me a number once occupied by Hugh Craig. Those who remember Hugh Craig will realize that that is not a totally irrelevant comment because one of the things that he was concerned about was the role of laypeople in the Church of England, and it is that principle which lies behind all the Church Representation Rules and indeed the whole Synodical Government Measure itself: that, together, lay and clerical members of the Church of England work for the government of the Church, whether it is at parish level, deanery, diocese or here in General Synod.

Members who were members of their PCCs at the last round of annual meetings will know that one of the very first things that the PCC has to do is to elect a lay vice-chairman, and that lay vice-chairman, as Mrs Granger has already pointed out, is there to chair the meeting if the incumbent is incapacitated or absent for any reason, or if the incumbent wishes to stand down from the chair in order to take an active part in the debate, and specifically during the interregnum.

That particular role of the lay vice-chairman is the one that I wish to preserve, and the meaning of this particular proposal as phrased by the revision committee’s report, it seems to me, could (could, not must) be taken to say that any cleric is preferable to the lay vice-chairman in terms of chairing the PCC. I do not think that that is what the committee intended. I have no problems with the origin of the proposal, which Synod members will find came from Sallie Bassham and relates to the role of non-stipendiaries (as they used to be called) and clergy with permission to officiate, where they are effectively *in loco parentis*, acting as the incumbent or minister in charge in a parish but, because of the system of synodical government, do not have the position that is defined and allows them to chair the PCC.

I have no problem with that, but I believe that the way the proposal is phrased cuts across the principle of the lay and the clerical working together, so I put forward my proposal. Clearly, in the light of last night’s debate, not only this proposal but everything else in the Church Representation Rules will have to be looked at to expunge the words “non-stipendiary minister”, and I am sure that the Legal Department are looking forward with joy to having to do that!

My proposal has three parts. First, it restores the situation which is in Appendix 2 of the Church Representation Rules: 'the minister of the parish' – not necessarily the incumbent in team parishes: it may be that the team vicar who is not the rector chairs the PCC in his particular bit of the parish, and also that happens in multi-parish benefices and where there are other clerics who have this minister-in-charge role. Most importantly for me, it restores the role of the lay vice-chairman who takes the chair properly when the incumbent, or the minister who has that incumbent role, is not present. However, I have put in that it is subject to this provision, which is the one which enshrines what Ms Bassham wants, that a clergyman or woman who is in that role of effectively being the minister in charge but without the appropriate bits of paper can actually chair the PCC. It enshrines the original request that the retired priest with permission to officiate can, with the consent of the PCC and the bishop, chair the PCC. It also clarifies, in relation to the original wording, what happens if the benefice is vacant, and it asks the PCC to take on the role of consulting with the bishop to make a provision.

The third reason why I think that my wording is slightly better than that of the original is parsimony: it is actually shorter. I am a great believer in Occam's Razor: I cut things down as much as I possibly can. I work as a statistician, and statisticians always look for the simplest answer to the most complicated questions. I believe that that is what I have provided. The Church Representation Rules are never simple and always detailed, but I believe that what I have put forward enshrines the principle of the lay and clerical working together and does not allow a situation where a clergy person of any kind can take over the role single-handed. It is not just lawyers and Church Representation Rules nuts like me who feel very strongly about the role of the laity in the Church Representation Rules.

Mrs Penny Granger: None is a greater supporter than I of the role of the laity, and members will be glad to know that the steering committee will accept this amendment. However, for people who were not here last time or whenever we last looked at it, I ought perhaps to say one or two things.

We unanimously accepted the proposal from Ms Bassham which now forms the substance of the present paragraph 8 of the Schedule. That amendment sought to meet a particular specific case, but one, it must be said, that is growing, especially in rural areas. Members will have heard that Dr Cull's amendment incorporates Ms Bassham's proposal and it also addresses two consequential issues that the revision committee was not asked to consider.

The steering committee had a slight hesitation over Dr Cull's use of the rather esoteric phrase 'chairman of the council'; however, it is the term used in the Church Representation Rules, and we recognize that the sort of PCC that Dr Cull is concerned about will be likely to have the rules, as she does, as bedtime reading. So the steering committee would like to invite the Synod to vote for Dr Cull's amendment as it provides a more comprehensive coverage of the situation where an incumbent may not be the obvious person to chair a PCC in a variety of circumstances.

Ms Sallie Bassham (Bradford): I ask Synod to support Dr Cull's amendment and confirm what everybody has just been saying about me. I did indeed make the submission; it was at the request of a local group of parishes and with the support of their deanery to recognize changing patterns of ministry, and Dr Cull's amendment does very well what I sought to achieve, and I also like her order and her parsimony. I hope that Synod will vote for this amendment.

The amendment was put and carried.

Mrs Penny Granger: I beg to move:

'That paragraph 8 of the Schedule, as amended, stand part of the Measure.'

The motion was put and carried.

The Long Title

The Archdeacon of Tonbridge (Ven. Judith Rose): I beg to move:

'That the Long Title stand part of the Measure.'

The motion was put and carried.

The Chairman: That completes the revision stage of the draft Measure and it now stands committed to the steering committee in respect of final drafting.

As regards the other matter on the legislative agenda, the Parsonages Measure (Amendment) Rules, members will see from the order paper that Mr Cheeseman has withdrawn his request for this matter to be debated, and it will therefore be taken under the deemed procedure.

THE CHAIR *Mrs Diana Webster (Europe)* took the Chair at 10.18 a.m.

Diocesan Synod Motion

Communion before Confirmation

The Bishop of Bristol (Rt Revd Barry Rogerson): I beg to move:

'That this Synod request the House of Bishops to initiate a change in canon law, thereby enabling this Synod, on behalf of the Church of England, to decide whether to retain the inherited norm of "confirmation before Communion" or to change its practice to affirm the norm, for those who have been baptized, to receive Communion

before confirmation, rather than to leave it to individual diocesan bishops and parishes to make the decision.'

I am rarely allowed to intercede in church, and so Sunday by Sunday I hear intercessions and from them you can tell what the interceder believes; sometimes that is quite worrying. However, you can tell what a Church believes by its liturgy and praxis. You only need to consider what happens to the elements after Communion to know that this is true. This debate is in part, and only in part, about what the Church of England now believes about Christian initiation. I use that phrase so that there is no misunderstanding: it is more than infant baptism; it is the process by which men and women, boys and girls are moved from the solidarity of the world into the solidarity of the people of God.

This is not a debate about our inherited pattern of Christian initiation nor a debate about a new pattern of Christian initiation – Communion before confirmation – nor is it a debate about Christian nurture for, whatever pattern we affirm, Christian nurture is integral to that process. No, this is a debate about how the Church of England knows what it believes about Christian initiation and how, if necessary, it changes its doctrine and praxis.

It is now nearly 50 years since Professor Geoffrey Lampe published a book entitled *The Seal of the Spirit* and in that time there has been no end to the debates that have taken place in the Synod. Some members have been directly involved in our deliberations for many years, but there has been no resolution of the differences which lie among us. So the matter was sent eventually to the House of Bishops in 1997 which, in its turn, provided guidelines for Communion before confirmation.

The guidelines began by saying, 'Since "Communion before confirmation" is a departure from our inherited norm, it requires special permission. After consultation, every diocesan bishop will have the discretion to make a general policy whether or not to entertain new applications for "Communion before confirmation" to take place in his diocese.'

For over a year, beginning in 1997, the parishes of the diocese of Bristol were consulted. They were asked, after receiving papers articulating the differing understandings of Christian initiation, whether or not they wished 'to change the inherited pattern of Christian initiation, i.e. baptism, confirmation, first Communion, to a situation where young people may receive Holy Communion before they were confirmed'. The result of all our deliberations was not untypical of dioceses across our two provinces: 6 per cent wanted change, 26 per cent did not, but – and it was a big but – a significant number of parishes, including those who had decided one way or another, wanted the Church of England to have a clear and agreed understanding of Christian initiation and, as a result, a common praxis. The Bristol Diocesan Synod Motion grew out of this listening to the grass roots, to parishes. It may be uncomfortable, it may even be untimely, but it is a voice that has spoken, and part of our process as a General Synod is to listen to what our parishes say to us.

The diocese of Bristol is in line with the vast majority of dioceses in our two provinces. Thirty-two dioceses have introduced the possibility of Communion before confirmation, and three have a significant number of parishes involved; but overall (and for this information I must thank my fellow bishops for sharing with me the number of parishes who have already moved to Communion before confirmation) out of 12,976 parishes in the two provinces not more than 700 have already put Communion before confirmation into practice. There are in fact a number considering it, and obviously that number will rise; but at the present time that represents 5 per cent of all parishes, which means that Bristol is a little less conservative than the average.

You only need to read the responses to the ecumenical document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, known affectionately as BEM, to know that it is not easy to have a clear understanding of what is involved in Christian initiation. The history of the tradition within the post-Reformation Church of England is not clear, bright and sparkling; it could be said to be rather muddy at times. Nevertheless it might be fair to suggest that the distinction between the departure from the inherited norm and the norm itself is something about, on the one hand, belonging and nurture and, on the other hand, commitment and a second empowerment. There is a real debate to be had, and there is no doubt about that; and there are some important insights which need to be teased out and incorporated into our praxis.

When there are two patterns of Christian initiation being followed within one Church, this has implications for the corporate life of a diocese, between dioceses, within our provinces and between provinces in the Anglican Communion. Listen to one of the diocesan guidelines, which reflects exactly the pastoral dilemma: 'It is impossible to force the policy of one parish on to another, and therefore there will be difficulties when families move from one parish to another. It should be made clear that admission to Holy Communion before confirmation is "for this parish only". However, unconfirmed communicant people who move to another parish will be commended to their new incumbent as communicant members of the Church.'

The present situation can and does confuse those involved in local ecumenical partnerships, where the debate about Communion before confirmation has also introduced a debate about Communion before baptism, and on very real theological grounds. Our lack of clarity about what we believe about Christian initiation has serious ecumenical implications.

This motion seeks that clarity. In the world of the market, or in a world where private decisions are made about religious faith, practice and commitment, there is a danger that we can drift into a praxis which reflects the least that would be required of us as individuals and congregations. There is this possibility. There is in the world of economics something called Gresham's Law that observes that 'bad money drives out good'. It originated at a time when nations commonly kept both gold and silver coins in circulation. If the nominal values of the coins were different from their actual

values, the coins that were worth more tended to be hoarded or melted down for their metallic content, and thus disappeared from circulation. Members can use their imagination to see what might happen in the future if we do not have a clear understanding of what our norm is going to be.

What we have at the present time is an acknowledgement that Communion before confirmation departs from the inherited norm and so requires special permission. We have not as a Church made a decision to change our doctrine and our administration of the sacraments. Such a process requires, as members will have gleaned from their survival guide and reading SOs 60, 81 and 131, that we perhaps should have used Article 7 or even Article 8 business before we departed from the inherited norm.

We are to be stewards of the sacraments: precious outward and visible signs of our relationship with God and undergirded by the life and mission of Jesus Christ. This is a serious reflection of parishioners who wish to understand and practise what the Church teaches and believes. What the parishes of the diocese of Bristol are asking of this Synod is that we put in place a process whereby there will be a common practice based on a common understanding of what the Church of England teaches about Christian initiation.

The Chairman imposed a speech limit of five minutes.

Canon Paul Brett (Chelmsford): This motion is confusing. I am not sure what the result will be if I vote for it or against it. The GS background paper seems to argue for this practice but the Bristol paper reveals 'no overwhelming desire to change'. So what are they really after?

On the face of it, the motion seems very mild. It simply asks, to put it in a nutshell, for a vote to enable the Synod to decide whether to stay the same or to change instead of leaving it to individuals to decide whether to change or to stay the same. If this motion were passed and then that led to the adoption of this practice nationally, I believe that it would further open up a can of worms already partly open. Let me give Synod a very practical example.

On a Sunday some time ago, as I went along the altar rail giving Communion to people, I came to a family well known to me – I will call them Family H, just in case the press quote this and embarrass us all – with mum confirmed and dad not yet confirmed and four children all under twelve. Those young smiling faces looked up at me in expectation. Two of them held out their hands hoping that I would give them a wafer and when I gave them a blessing instead they turned to their mum with a look full of questions. A few weeks ago, the mum – we will call her A – asked her two eldest boys, C and D, who are twins, if they would like to join our confirmation course starting in January. When C looked at the topics in our nine-week programme and saw that the first one was called 'Does God exist?' he agreed to join the class, so his mum told me, provided he could say that he thought that God did not exist. So, she asked,

would I let him in or not? Yes of course, I replied. I would rather people asked questions and thought about things than just went through the motions. I did not tell her about Canon B 15A or ask whether he was truly desirous of being confirmed, although he probably did not discern the body. As members may imagine, I look forward to some fun on 10 January.

What would I have to do in such a situation if we had formally introduced Communion before confirmation in our Church as a whole? The Hs are a lovely Christian family; it would be invidious to decide that A could and C might do if he agreed not to say x and D could but E and F were still too young and B did not want to anyway, at least not yet. Take away the line that is confirmation and you produce confusion, even chaos, within families, let alone within and between congregations.

Confirmation, whatever theological or ecumenical difficulties we may have with it, is a clear, personal public statement; it is a step on a spiritual journey, and life is full of transitions like this. Each one may be accompanied by preparation, sometimes by apprehension or uncertainty as well, and then by joy in the making of it.

I believe that there is great merit in saying to people that being a communicant member of the Church is a serious matter; it requires understanding and conscious commitment; it is a step you should take, as in another context, not carelessly, lightly or selfishly but reverently, responsibly and after serious thought; and confirmation is the gateway to it.

So I want to stop this practice in our Church of admitting members of our congregations to Communion before they have been confirmed before it gets any further. If voting for this motion will help that, then I am for it.

Revd Stephen Betts (Norwich): I would like to talk about my children but not to give them initials. Their names are Kieran and Dominic. Several months ago, my elder son Kieran came up to the communion rail in the way that has just been described, held out his hands and with very wide eyes said, 'Daddy, please can I have some?'. What was I to do as a priest, let alone as a parent? When Kieran was baptized we welcomed him with these words: 'God has received you by baptism into his Church. We welcome you into the Lord's Family. We are members together of the Body of Christ; we are children of the same heavenly Father; we are inheritors together of the kingdom of God. We welcome you.' I take those words seriously and my wife now does share her Communion with my two children. I am not convinced by scriptural arguments that what she does is wrong. I am not convinced by arguments about understanding that what she does is wrong because I, like many clergy, I suspect, take Communion to those who might sometimes seem confused, without asking for an understanding. Which leaves Church order. What am I to do when other parents similarly have debates or discussions with their children when they see our example?

I would strongly support the principle of a unified practice with some sense of logic

and consistency, but please let us have something which enables us to respond in a spirit of generosity to the Christian families who worship with us week by week.

Mrs Gill Ambrose (Ely): I am also the children's work adviser in the diocese of Ely and I want to oppose this motion and welcome the amendment to be moved by Bishop Buchanan.

GS Misc 626 informs us that the majority of our dioceses – 35 – have agreed to implement the House of Bishops' guidelines and allow parishes to consider and apply to implement a change of practice. In my own diocese, just under 40 parishes out of a diocese of 300 have now taken this step. They are very varied parishes. Some of them are small parishes in groups who have done it together, and others are large parishes. I believe that if we find ourselves carrying this motion we may well be saying in a few years' time to those parishes where children are now communicants, 'We're withdrawing this from you.' That would give a very mean-spirited if not disastrous message.

What I have found in working with parishes is that the opportunity to discuss this and to consider initiation has been enormously beneficial. The Church has its rules but in an abstract sense they often do not mean a great deal to people; but where parishes have decided to take this step and think about initiation it has made the whole thing come alive and be much more meaningful for them. In the diocese we have established quite a formal process for making that consideration and making an application to change our practice. Some people have said to me that it is formidable, but where parishes have done this and where I have been and worked with them to help them to change, there has been an enormous growth of understanding which has helped not only the children but all the adults involved. It has really been quite a thrilling process.

With one exception, all the submissions that have been made to the Bishop (and I have been shown them all to help him decide how to respond to them) have been of very high quality, revealing that there has been very careful consultation and a great deal of thought. So the whole process has been enormously valuable, not only for children but as an educational process for adults. We need to remember that when children are baptized they are baptized into a community of faith. We as adults take on a responsibility for helping them to grow in faith, and questioning is a valuable part of that process. All adults, communicants or not, go through periods where they ask very profound questions about faith. Are we saying that children should not have that opportunity as well?

So I would like to suggest that it is the local decision-making in this process which is good for us. It allows us as a Church to be grown-up, to consider hard questions and to make decisions as communities which will bind us together. Diversity in the Church of England is one of our treasures and one of our strengths. We do not need to be afraid of it. The decision-making process has strengthened the ministry of all the people in the parishes who have done this; it has made them much more aware of the need to be with children as they grow in faith and that it is the responsibility of all

Christian people in Christian communities to be close to children and to share their faith with them. I hope that it will continue to be a valuable process in this way.

Canon Stephen Taylor (Durham): My former parish in Stranton, Hartlepool began discussions in parallel with the House of Bishops in 1997 to discern whether or not there might be circumstances where children might receive Communion before confirmation. Part of the reason for our question was that we were entering into a local ecumenical partnership where our two neighbouring Churches, Methodist and United Reformed, gave Communion to children and, were they to join us for a Communion service, their children would be entitled to receive Communion and ours would not. My journey and that of my parish was from a position of ignorant opposition to one of enlightened support. I observed the same journey being made by Synod, beginning in 1971 and resisting opposition, similar to the one suggested earlier, in 1976, and it is one that I hope will continue, to support this movement today.

The process of enlightenment for us was enabled in part by the late Michael Vasey, and Synod, for its part, must be indebted to Diana Murrie who has done an excellent job in explaining the historic encumbrances which have become attached to confirmation and exclude many children from an outward expression of membership. The journey that each parish church needs to make will inevitably be different, and my church was unusual inasmuch as many of its members had not had their children baptized, partly because of their previous Church background, partly because they disagreed with Augustine, and partly because the ASB encouraged thanksgiving, thereby implicitly encouraging baptism at a later stage. So for us the journey was about rediscovering baptism, just as the Church a few decades before had rediscovered Holy Communion. The service on the Sunday when a large tank was brought to the front of the church and filled by the fire brigade to enable different children who had not been baptized to be baptized will stick in the minds of many. More memorable, however, was the following Sunday when the children who had been prepared received Communion, not giggling or irreverently, as some might have feared, but with an extraordinary devotion that brought tears to the eyes of many. 'It feels so right,' summed up one member of the congregation afterwards.

So confirmation is now free from the pressures to be earlier and earlier, free from the negative perception that is a barrier to be overcome; instead it is a positive opportunity to come of age in the Church. May Synod come of age too and do some joined-up working. Let us take heed of the Archbishops' Council's theme to welcome children and to trust the House of Bishops to bring back to us an appropriately worded canon. As Synod today, we have an opportunity to encourage children to come to Christ in the sacraments. Let us not stop them.

The Bishop of Portsmouth (Rt Revd Kenneth Stevenson): I welcome this debate but will not be supporting the Bristol motion. I welcome the debate because it is timely that we revisit at this stage the current commission, agreed overwhelmingly by Synod and the House of Bishops, that parishes so minded can introduce Communion before

confirmation, on the proviso that there is adequate sacramental nurture and formation before and after; but I do not think that we have travelled far enough along this road to justify altering canon law. In taking this position I want to make three observations: one pastoral, one historical and one ecumenical.

First, the pastoral one. In the Church at large we are faced with an increasingly varied scene which is not of our own making and which many people regard as having the signs of a post-Christendom society. In the Portsmouth diocese I regularly confirm at nine or ten in urban Catholic parishes and at 16 in suburban Evangelical ones; I hardly ever confirm without baptizing, and the number of so-called adults being confirmed everywhere continues to rise, many of them retired, sometimes very old. There are also the added complications – and they are welcome ones – of ecumenical visitors, some of whom do not know what to do in receiving the host, Lutherans putting two fingers up like *that* and others wanting to receive straight into the mouth, a thing that parish priests are faced with all the time. The rites of baptism and confirmation in *Common Worship* express and embody exactly this scene.

Second, the historical observation. The theological aspects of confirmation and its relation to admission to Communion have varied in the Anglican tradition from the word go. In the first Prayer Book of 1549 confirmation was absolutely required before Holy Communion, yet the service had no full profession of faith beyond the catechism. Later in the sixteenth century for much of Queen Elizabeth I's reign it appears that bishops seldom held confirmations at all, so we must assume that people were catechized in the parishes and admitted to Communion straightaway. By 1662, however, the words 'ready or desirous' were added to the confirmation rubric, which is less restrictive, and that is what is embodied in our canon law; but the 1662 service for the first time has a full profession of baptismal vows which was added to the service under pressure from Puritans and High Churchmen together.

My third observation is about the ecumenical scene. Most Churches developed, for good or ill, some kind of access point to Holy Communion beyond baptism. In the Orthodox tradition, baptism and chrismation admit infants and children straightaway but adults usually have to undergo penance before going to Communion, except at Easter when a part of the homily of John Chrysostom is read which does not imply any such restriction. Roman Catholic practice varies. It sounds an uncertain note. Early in the twentieth century Pope Pius X encouraged Holy Communion before confirmation, but since Vatican II the scene has reverted in many places to requiring confirmation, and this too varies in this country as regards age and whether or not it can be delegated by the bishop to priests. Lutherans only introduced confirmation in the eighteenth century as purely a rite of commitment prior to Holy Communion, but they are in flux too. We share this pluriform picture.

For these three reasons, I would urge Synod and the House of Bishops to keep the present norm with its inherent and inherited anomalies and the current, recently agreed commission, and keep it under review. We could be travelling towards baptism

as the sole admitting sacrament to Holy Communion, regardless of age or stage, but we have not reached that point quite yet.

Revd Elizabeth Baxter (York): I would like to pay tribute to the many children who have taught me the theology of hospitality and to bring them into this chamber: my two sons who in 1979 were confirmed aged seven and eight and my two daughters who were received as communicants at age seven in 1982 and 1985, and children from the inner city of Leeds who found themselves welcomed to the altar of our church as part of a diocesan experiment from 1982 to 1993. As children and adults together, we encouraged and engaged with one another as we travelled our spiritual journeys, both within our eucharistically based Church and in the harsh realities of the wider community in those days. These are the children who helped to create an indigenous church welcome and inspired those of us who were older, freely and unconditionally empowering us to lay down our prejudices and fears and to embrace the child within ourselves. Their gifts of spontaneity, risk-taking, acceptance, adventure, faith, play, enthusiasm, deep spiritual insight, vision and touch, and even indeed cuddles, all helped others of us towards discovering possibilities of wisdom at the many crossroads of our individual and communal lives during those heady days, as was spoken of yesterday, of the 1980s and early 1990s, both in the inner city and in the wider Church. This mutuality and the real presence of children at the altar was and is today prophetic within a fragmented and exclusive world.

Sadly, I left that rich community to find myself in another diocese, ordained a priest and yet unable to extend priestly hospitality to children. I have to say that the loss for me is deeper than I can describe. I dare not presume to venture into the loss for God. The children I have spoken of, as young adults now, many of whom have chosen to be confirmed, will always know that they can come home to the hospitality of the altar when the moment on their journey is right. Whatever their process, they will make choices that arise from a sense of acceptance and belonging. As we think about norms this morning I call upon this Synod to consider that perhaps God's norm is one of abundant hospitality embodied primarily in the child Jesus.

Mrs Dana Delap (Durham): Like most parents with young children I have shushed mine to keep quiet in church services. One Sunday about three years ago I was chastizing mine for being naughty. 'Come on,' I said, 'you know this prayer. Say it with me: "Though we are many we are one body because we all share in one bread".' 'But I don't,' she said, 'I don't.' As members can imagine, it was a very challenging moment for me. My daughter was admitted to Communion when she started school and now my son receives Communion too. It has changed our family's spirituality. It has changed the attitude of my church towards the place of children in worship. It has encouraged and strengthened their spirituality but it has also been encouraged and strengthened to learn from them and to be disciples together.

A year ago my family and I moved to another parish and before we arrived I went to speak to the incumbent and the churchwardens because I knew that our arrival would

precipitate a debate on children and Communion, and of course it has. The children in that parish are asking to receive. So yes, I agree with the Bishop of Bristol: there is a pastoral dilemma here but I am not sure that legislating on the issue will ease the confusion because that muddiness is present in everything that we do. It is part of what I love about the Church of England as well as what frustrates me.

Realistically the Church of England is probably unable to stop that trickle of children who are admitted to Communion. Parents move about; we have families joining us from other parts of the Anglican Communion as well as from other denominations. They raise questions among their congregations and other children begin to ask to receive if they are there as faithful members of the congregation week after week. I think that in time the Church will come to a mind on the precedents of children receiving, but please do not let us move this debate from the parishes and from the dioceses. That gives the churches time to explore the potential of this, the pastoral, the spiritual and the liturgical implications. Let us do that before we begin to legislate on this.

The Bishop of Woolwich (Rt Revd Colin Buchanan): I wish that I could add anecdotes (of which I have many) to support what I want to say, but I have no time to raise anything except principles. The trumpet from Bristol is, I think, timely but uncertain in its sound and we need to clarify that sound, which is what my amendment proposes to do. I want to refer to four separate topics that it raises.

First of all, the principle. We have heard plenty about the principle. This Synod has been considering it for 30 years. I was here right from the start when Ely came; I was a member of Knaresborough; worldwide, Boston and Toronto have both put pressure on us, reflecting what is happening in other parts of the world; and the trend is always in the same direction. In this country I would urge that the critical mass is already well developed and there is no going back. I hope that the Synod will not even give Bristol the option of going back.

I should just add that in my own area, inherited from the illegal days of old Southwark, over two-thirds of parishes admit children to Communion and clearly there can be no turning back there – but you would not want to make Southwark even more illegal than it has been in the past, I am sure! Indeed, I want the children to have Communion.

Second, on the question of canons, Bristol has asked us to change the canons but nobody dreamed of telling us what they were; it is not in their document or in their motion and I had to ask that the canon be given to us so we actually know where we are; obviously laity do not have canons and I suspect that a lot of clergy do not (but that is another story). My amendment quotes from the canon but we needed the text in front of us. Canon B 15A has always provided, right from the days of the 1960s, very foresightedly for us to provide by regulation that which is now before us. It does not need a change in the canons, and only people who have not looked at the canons would think that; the canons have been waiting to be used by this Synod.

It has to be confessed that the House of Bishops acted, in a way, extra-canonically in its guidelines and Brian Hanson asks me to reassure the Synod that it was not on his advice! Diana Murrie thinks that we acted under 'ready and desirous', which has never been mentioned in that connection before and will not work. It was extra-canonical and it is time that this Synod took it on board, made it lawful and made it from the whole Synod: voting for regulations in line with the Canon, as my amendment says, is the way to do it. It means that we can then work through where the guidelines are working and where they might be pinching because they are not quite accurate, and turn them into regulations which are fairly lightweight and can themselves be revised in the future without going to Parliament or whatever one has to do with canons.

The next thing that I wanted to mention in the Bristol motion is the question of norms. There are norms mentioned in the House of Bishops' document but if we go for my amendment the House of Bishops' document goes down the tubes of history. In any case, there are a lot of half-way houses in the Bishops' document because it had to convince some fairly reluctant and conservative bishops. As members know, it took 26 years and a lot of change-over in bishops, including archbishops, in that time to get there. However, I do not think that you can look for norms of doctrine to be set out in the canons. The canons touch praxis. If members go with my amendment, they will affirm that baptism and confirmation admits, that being a communicant of another denomination admits – both those are already happening under 1(a) and (b) – and that other baptized persons, such as we may regulate, may also be admitted, and in doing so the common theme of all three will be baptism; so that will say 'norm' without actually making a strong doctrinal statement. I hope that that will do.

The only other things I have to say are in relation to the other amendments. I believe that the Bishop of Dover's amendment would be nicely swallowed up by mine so I hope that no one will vote against mine in order to get his. Second, I hope that Sheila Grieve's amendment is tossed out because we are already in a situation where those who are communicant once must be communicant everywhere; that is part of the way this practice is growing normally as well as through crises in particular families, as we have already heard, or doctrinal convictions about our liturgy or about Scripture: it is very odd to say that this is a necessary means of grace but that you have to show signs of grace in your early teens before you are admitted to the means of grace (a rather 'cart before the horse' way of doing things).

The Bishop of Dover (Rt Revd Stephen Venner): I speak not as a clever theologian-bishop (and I shall go away and find out what 'praxis' means after this debate!) but as a jobbing bishop – (*Members: Oh!*) – but one who has been privileged to work in the diocese of Southwark and the diocese of Manchester, both of which have had parishes admitting children to Communion for many years, and now in the diocese of Canterbury where, thank God, a number of our parishes are going down that road too. I speak also as a member of the working party that produced *All God's Children?* with Gavin Reid – no, I did not produce them with Gavin Reid, but you know what I mean – where we pointed out that, at that point, 85 per cent of the nation's children

were largely or completely untouched by the Church; it had taken us three generations of hard work to lose them and there was the challenge that it would take us at least that to get them back. I then was privileged to be asked to serve on the working party producing *On The Way* where we looked at those children and adults who were on the way back and how we might support and encourage them.

All this has happened as part of that process, for what we are about is asking how, with a generous God who wants us all to be friends of his and to walk with Jesus, that generous God wants us to bring families, including their children, into that close personal relationship. We are all agreed that baptism is the essential gateway into Christian life; we all agree, I think, as Anglicans (I hope we do) that Holy Communion and confirmation are also important, essential points on that way. We are at a strange stage at the moment because we have only just, in the past two or three years, allowed most parishes who wish to do so to begin to explore what it would mean to help children receive Communion and be open to that generous God who wishes to feed them through that sacrament and how that relates to Holy Communion. How do we do it and yet see it as part of a process leading to full adult commitment?

There are many parishes up and down the country who are doing wonderful work, exploring that and finding it hugely enriching, both in terms of the very wonderful human stories that we have heard this morning and also in terms of their own nurture of themselves as the Christian Body of Christ in their particular parish and also with their families. However, most parishes have only just started this process; even those who are keen and ready to go have only been doing it for two or three years. I really do think that, on a simple, practical basis, it is far too soon for us to assess whether this is of value as part of the armoury of arrows at our disposal. So my amendment – you do not have to swallow Bishop Buchanan's; you can go for mine instead – says: why not ask the House of Bishops to do the one thing that we forgot to do in 1997, which was to put a monitoring procedure in place? Why do we not ask the House of Bishops to monitor the process and come back to us within the life of this Synod, in 2005, with a clearer picture of what is happening round the country? There are many parishes, as members will have read in Diana Murrie's excellent paper – I want to thank her for it; it was most helpful – which need time to work it out and see what they are doing.

I believe that at the end of the day we will still have a muddle. I am so grateful to Bishop Kenneth for explaining that everybody else is in the same muddle, and perhaps that tells us something about the God whose loving generosity we receive.

I hope, therefore, that in due course when I move my amendment people will accept it and help this process to move on and ask the House of Bishops to help us reflect on all the advantages of it, which I am sure they will do overwhelmingly in 2005.

Dr Sheila Grieve (Chester): As the Bishop of Bristol told us in moving, this is not a debate about the principle; it is really a debate about having a debate about the

principle. I have been on Synod since 1985 and in that time we have had various reports about the issue but we have never as a General Synod debated the principle and passed a change of the normative practice. That is important, judging by many of the comments that have been made today. In 1991 we debated and passed a motion that said 'That this Synod affirm the traditional sequence of baptism–confirmation–admission to Communion as normative in the Church of England', and we allowed experiments in Holy Communion before confirmation.

One of the things that bothers me about contributions to the debate, perhaps from Mrs Ambrose and from others, is the worry that this experiment may cease. By its very nature an experiment is an experiment, so it may cease. However, I believe that we are being overtaken by a change of practice before the Synod has debated the principle. In 1996, in a report from the House of Bishops, GS 1212, we approved guidelines to deal with the experiments. The approval was based on the report from the House of Bishops, and I quote from one of the paragraphs (this is 1996 from the Bishops): 'The view of the House of Bishops is that the pattern set out in paragraph 9 [which says baptism, confirmation, Holy Communion] continues to be appropriate for the Church of England, that it provides a setting for the support of individual Christians in their journey of faith and that it should be regarded as the normal practice in our Church.'

The present situation is becoming chaotic when many dioceses are now changing their practice and having experiments to admit children to Holy Communion before confirmation but many parishes are continuing the normative pattern. I want to stress this: they are the ones who are continuing the normal pattern. The guidelines from the House of Bishops, paragraph (j), say this (and this is what worries me), 'No baptized person, child or adult, who has been once admitted to Holy Communion and remains in good standing with the Church, should anywhere be deprived of it.' That is a very prescriptive guideline; it is prescriptive on the churches which are following the normative practice, which is approved by this General Synod.

I think that this will produce pastoral problems in the churches as families move in with children who have already been used to receiving Holy Communion. I am really quite ambivalent about the basic decision as to whether we do change, and that is why I am in favour of the Bishop of Bristol's motion: we need to make up our minds, we need to decide here in General Synod and we do not need to be overtaken by circumstances. There is a pastoral problem which will increase as children come to churches which follow the normative pattern and say that they want to take Holy Communion, when there is a different discipline in that church.

In the Chester diocese we have debated this and agreed to experiment. I want to recommend to members one of our clauses, which is the spirit of my amendment. This is what we agreed: 'Synod encourages all clergy and parishes in the diocese to recognize the admission of individual children to Communion whilst respecting the conscience of those clergy who are unwilling to administer Holy Communion to

children before confirmation, notwithstanding clause (j) of the House of Bishops' guidelines.' That is what my amendment seeks to do. It seeks to emphasize that the parishes following the normative pattern must be able to continue to do so and must not be obliged to follow the experimental way. I hope that members will vote for my amendment if and when it is moved.

Revd Paul Farthing (Lichfield): On a point of order, Madam Chairman. Could someone tell me whether the final section of this amendment would in fact have the effect of allowing parishes to refuse Communion to those admitted under sections (b) and (d)? In my particular case, my wife and children are Roman Catholic; my child has not been confirmed but has been admitted to Communion in another Church which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and is in good standing therewith. As this amendment currently stands, I would like to know if parishes could refuse to admit her to Communion if it were carried.

The Chairman: I am sorry: that is not a point of order.

Revd Paul Farthing (Lichfield): A point of explanation then, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: There is actually no such thing, I believe. Is that correct? Yes. Sorry about that. Or not allowed in Standing Orders, anyway.

The Bishop of Woolwich (Rt Revd Colin Buchanan): I beg to move as an amendment:

'*Leave out* all the words after "request" and *insert* the words "the Archbishops' Council, after consultation with the House of Bishops, to introduce into this Synod draft regulations for the admission of baptized but unconfirmed children and adults to Communion under the provisions of Canon B 15A 1(c), which states "[there shall be admitted to the Holy Communion] any other baptized persons authorized to be admitted under regulations of the General Synod", so as to encourage norms of national practice in this respect.'

I do so enthusiastically.

The Bishop of Bristol: I thank the Bishop of Woolwich for the robust way in which he deals with this issue. I have to say that I would ask the Synod not to vote in favour because in fact it talks about there being norms and that has an 's' on the end of it. The Diocesan Synod Motion was asking for clarity so that there is a certain sound coming and so that we are clear what it is we believe and how we are to work this out in practice in our own parishes and dioceses and as a whole Church. I believe that what Colin Buchanan is asking us to do is to say that, from now onwards, there are two patterns of Christian initiation which we support as a Church, despite all the pastoral problems that that will bring about, as we have already heard. I believe that his amendment is nonsense: nearly a wrecking motion, but not quite.

Revd Richard Thomas (Oxford): I very much want to support the amendment that stands in the name of the Bishop of Woolwich. Dr Grieve complained that we were being overtaken by events, as if somehow this Synod could control matters. I would like to suggest that the overtaking by events might be one of the signs of the Spirit that calls us to reflect on what is happening in our Church. I am not sure that the Church of England gives out a very child-friendly message. I certainly want to change that. I have two children, both of whom under the present arrangements have not been able to receive, although they have wanted to. I do not want to say more than that, except to urge acceptance of this amendment.

The Bishop of Rochester (Rt Revd Michael Nazir-Ali): Whatever proposals are brought to the Synod, they should be brought to it by the House of Bishops and by no other body, as there are important matters of doctrine and worship involved here. It is for that reason that I am opposed to this amendment. Like the Bishop of Dover I too have been moved by the very many stories which we have heard, but whatever decision is made here this morning and indeed whatever decisions are made by the House of Bishops must be informed by fundamental theological principles, and it is these about which we have not heard very much at all this morning, I regret to say.

On the basis of God's covenant with all his people, including households, children of believing parents are to be regarded as holy and as members of a covenant community. That is the burden, as I read it, of 1 Corinthians 7. If children are included in the baptism of households, mentioned in the New Testament, it is because of this sense that they cannot be excluded from the covenant relationship. If the Passover, moreover, remains fundamental to our understanding of the Eucharist, it is clear that children are not excluded from this meal, even today; indeed they have a special part to play in it. On the other hand – there is always that! – partaking worthily of the Lord's body and blood in the reception of Holy Communion has also been central to Christian thinking since the very early account of it in 1 Corinthians 11, however that passage is interpreted (and I am greatly indebted to Professor Thiselton for his guidance in this area). There is thus a tension between children's participation in the Eucharist on the basis of belonging to the covenant community and the apostolic admonition regarding the worthy partaking of the Lord's Supper. How is such a tension to be resolved?

Perhaps the way in which initiation is now seen as a process of nurture and development, rather than this or that event, is a way forward. All the baptized need to grow in the faith and this is particularly so of those who have been baptized as infants. We should not make the category mistake of regarding infant baptism as alike in every respect to adult or believer's baptism. (If that makes me a crypto-Baptist, so be it, Bishop Buchanan!) Children baptized on the basis of the faith of parents, sponsors and Church need to grow in understanding of that faith and the worship of the Church. Careful preparation for the receiving of Communion, even before confirmation, can be a part of nurture and growth in faith, but pastors, parents and the wider Church should be sure that there is appreciation of what is being done. The House of Bishops' guidelines point out that such an awareness need not necessarily be intellectual, but it must be real.

Such preparation for and receiving of Communion should be explicitly set within a programme of nurture which leads to confirmation as a public declaration of faith, a sealing by the Holy Spirit for witness and service, and a rite of passage to adult believing and belonging. There is indeed some evidence from other parts of the Anglican Communion to suggest that when Communion before confirmation becomes the norm, confirmation begins to disappear from the life of the Church. This must not be allowed to happen here; confirmation remains a vital moment in the development of a fully rounded Christian life.

There are many claims about Communion before confirmation in the early Church and in earlier centuries in the Church of England, but, the Bishop of Portsmouth notwithstanding, the evidence is scant and hard to come by. The example of the East is often given but we should beware that after initial baptism and chrismation children often do not receive until they are much older. If there is other evidence, I should like to hear it.

We must not simply capitulate to the values of our age, however attractive this option seems to us, in this and other debates. Also, whatever we decide, initiation should be seen as a process, especially for children.

Ms Anne Williams (Durham): On a point of order, Madam Chairman. I beg to move:

‘That the question be now put.’

This motion was put and carried.

A member: On a point of order, Madam Chairman. Would you be prepared to call a maiden speaker to speak against the amendment?

The Chairman: The closure has just been carried and I am afraid that debate on the amendment is now closed. I am sorry.

The amendment was put and lost.

The Bishop of Dover (Rt Revd Stephen Venner): I beg to move as an amendment:

‘*Leave out* all the words after “House of Bishops” and *insert* the words “to continue to monitor the implementation in dioceses of its 1997 guidelines on Communion before confirmation and to report back to the Synod by 2005, with a recommendation as to whether any changes in canon law are required as a result of developing practice and understanding in the Church.”.’

The Bishop of Bristol: This is a much more difficult amendment for the Synod to decide on. We have already heard from a number of speakers that having two patterns creates a certain dilemma in parishes where this is not accepted, and members

therefore need to ask themselves whether, in five years' time, it will be any easier to deal with the issue and the principle, on which we have just heard a very important speech from the Bishop of Rochester. Members have to decide as a Synod whether it is right to allow it to run for a number of years – five or so – and then make a decision one way or the other, or whether now is the time to look at the issue and make a decision on the pattern for our whole Church.

I must therefore leave it to the Synod because I believe that there is an important issue of pastoral care here that we need to look at carefully.

Revd Gill Dallow (Leicester): – and children's ministry officer in the diocese of Leicester. Many of the things that I wanted to say have been said, but I want to affirm the amendment moved by the Bishop of Dover. I too am involved at the moment in travelling round parishes looking at different situations in terms of whether children should receive Communion, and I am also grappling with some of the issues that have been raised today, but I want to say that I think that it is very much a question of time; we need to be patient; we need to pause; we need to help people think through issues; we need to ensure that there are valuable learning experiences going on as people ask key questions about the whole matter. We have not heard much about the effect on our Church life when children are able to receive Communion. We have not heard about nurture programmes. We have not heard about families worshipping together. We have not heard about the question of confirmation other than from a negative perspective.

I want to commend this amendment and ask that we take it back to our dioceses. The whole business four years ago, in 1997, was a half-way place; we now need to go further. What we cannot do, for the sake of our Church, for the sake of our children and young people, is go back. We are talking about welcoming them into our Church. The situation is dire and we want to do all we can to encourage the growth of the children and young people in our Church.

Mrs Elizabeth Fisher (Birmingham): Yes, we need to bring children into the Church and keep them there, but no, we are not yet clear as a Church which of the two approaches to Communion and confirmation represents the better response to this need. Given the present arrangements, which allow for a time of continuing experiment and discernment in the Church, this is not the time to precipitate a decision. Let me briefly set out two reasons for this view.

First, a decision taken at this stage would be based on inadequate experience because the current permissive arrangements have been in place for only a short time. There is neither a sufficient cumulative body of parish experience nor, in spite of the Culham Institute report, is there yet sufficient analysis of parish experience. Second, the attempt to make a decision at this stage would, I suspect, precipitate an unhelpful and immature debate. I say this because of the gap that I perceive between the thinking represented in the background paper GS Misc 626 and the statistics prepared by the

diocese of Bristol. GS 626 bespeaks a particular late-twentieth century approach to the child in Church and society. It is a direct descendant of the 1985 Knaresborough report, with its emphasis on children's sense of the right to belong, about which we have heard a lot today; but the other paper, from Bristol, tells us that only 6 per cent of the parishes were keen on changing the norm. It is not the case, I guess, that the rest of the parishes have not heard about child-centred spirituality and approaches to all-age worship. Rather, they may well believe, to use a common phrase, that the jury is still out on a series of matters about children and society. We need to look no further than the local primary schools to see that attitudes to the education and development of children have changed a great deal since the Knaresborough report, and are still changing. Is this the moment for the Church to resolve questions that continue to exercise our whole society? In this particular instance, I doubt it.

As a Church, therefore, we may fall under Elijah's prophetic criticism about Israel of old as halting between two opinions on the matter of confirmation and Communion, perhaps, we might add, not on that matter alone. However, there is one thing worse than remaining undecided, with all the consequences for local variation and ecumenical obfuscation that this entails. Worse than to remain undecided is to decide while the balance of one's mind is not so much disturbed perhaps as incomplete. A wise Church will tolerate the measure of modest confusion that we have in the interests of a wiser decision in the longer future, the future of our children and grandchildren.

I support the Bishop of Dover's amendment and urge the Synod to do so too.

Revd David Griffiths (Manchester): I wish to support the Bishop of Dover's amendment. Bishop Colin said that there was no going back. I am someone who has gone back. I introduced Communion for children when I was in my previous parish. We had a very good programme worked out for them. We introduced children to Communion when they were eight. It was then followed when they were 16 by confirmation. However, we were constantly faced with problems. What did we do about children who were coming to Church but without their parents, whose parents were quite happy for them to receive Communion but were certainly not with them in Church? What did we do with parents who said that they were not happy about their children receiving Communion until they had been confirmed? What happened when children who had received Communion at eight then started to fall away? Did we have to excommunicate them? How did we handle that situation?

So I think that there is need for a longer period of monitoring to see what has happened. Whether my experience is what happens across the country, I do not know, but I do think that there is a need for a longer period of monitoring to see what is happening.

Revd Chris Lilley (Lincoln): On a point of order, Madam Chairman. I beg to move:

'That the question be now put.'

This motion was put and carried.

The amendment was put and carried.

The Chairman: Therefore Dr Grieve's amendment falls and we move back to the main motion.

Canon Bob Baker (Norwich): On a point of order, Madam Chairman. On my order paper it says 'Whether or not'.

The Chairman: I will take advice on that. On the order paper it actually says 'Whether or not item 816 is carried and if item 817 is not carried'.

Dr Sheila Grieve (Chester): On a point of explanation, Madam Chairman. Could you explain why my amendment falls?

The Chairman: I am sorry, but again there is no such thing as a point of explanation in Standing Orders. However, if you would like to speak to me afterwards I will try to explain.

Revd David Staple (Ecumenical Representatives, Baptist Union): – and, pace the Bishop of Rochester, a non-crypto-Baptist! It is often said that if you have five Baptists you will have at least seven opinions. My observation of General Synod suggests that Baptists are not unique. This makes it very difficult to offer *the* Baptist view on any matter, but in the matter under discussion this morning there is complete unanimity among Baptists. We have no problem with this whatever, because of course confirmation has never been part of our tradition. It is only when we are involved in LEPs that there is any likelihood of this being seen as a problem. Members of Synod may well ask, therefore, why the Baptist ecumenical representative should see fit to put his name down to speak. I do so because I believe that our insights may help to tease out what underlies this debate.

For Baptists the key question has always been the personal faith of the individual, their personal trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, which is why most of our service books – and ours are not mandatory; they are guidelines to ministers – have invitations to Communion which stress repentance, love and charity to your neighbours, leading a new life following the Commandments of God, and then conclude 'Draw near with faith and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort and your strength.' This stress on personal faith tends to preserve Communion for the faithful, which would normally mean those of an age of discretion, say, mid-teens and upwards, and does not lead to a position where children expect to receive.

In practice (or is this praxis? I am not quite sure) there are other factors at work. One is that in very few Baptist churches can you find a weekly Communion; the norm is once a month in the morning – usually the first Sunday in the month – and once in the evening. Thus family and parade services tend to be held on other Sundays. In most

churches the process of Christian education, called Sunday School or Young Church or some other name that leaves people not knowing what it means, is carried on in other parts of the building than the worship area and at the same time; it means that children are not normally present during the actual observance of the Communion service. The exceptions to that in my ministry were occasions when children were brought in as part of their Christian education.

One other aspect of the matter needs spelling out. We are sometimes accused of admitting the unbaptized to Communion, and here we have to plead guilty because to do otherwise would be contrary to our own cherished beliefs. I said earlier that for Baptists the key question is the personal faith of the individual. This goes back to our beginnings in the early seventeenth century. First of all came the understanding that the New Testament pattern of Church was that it consisted not of the whole population of a place but only of those who believed. A little later came the second insight, which so many think of as our primary *raison d'être*, which was that if the Church consists only of believers then baptism, which is the means of entry into the Church, ought also only to be for believers. The matter of immersion as the mode of baptism came third. The primary question was always the faith, the belief, the trust, call it what you may, of the individual, not the subject of baptism or the mode of baptism or even the actual baptism in water.

So faced with the question which began to arise in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as society became more mobile and as other barriers began to be lowered, the question of whether the unbaptized might receive Communion, the answer had to be, if we were to be true to our beliefs, that any believing Christian should be welcome at the table. I have to add that for most Baptists of the last century (by which I mean the nineteenth; we have not quite reached the end of the twentieth) – (*Members: Hear, hear.*) – infant baptism was not recognized as baptism at all and, for them, welcoming the Christian baptized in infancy was on a par with welcoming the Christian who had received no baptism. I think that in this century some of us have moved to a greater understanding of the position on infant baptism.

I indicated at the start that I was hesitant as to whether a Baptist contribution would be relevant. I overcame the hesitation because I suspect, on reflection, that if admission to Communion and the faith of the individual were more closely tied together in Church of England thinking it might point the way to a solution of the problem of whether Communion should or should not be permitted to precede confirmation.

The Chairman: I would like to point out that this is Mr Staple's last day in the Synod. I am sure that we would all like to express our appreciation of his contribution to it and also that of the other ecumenical representatives who are retiring. (*Applause*)

Ms Anne Williams (Durham): On a point of order, Madam Chairman. I beg to move:

'That the question be now put.'

This motion was put and carried.

The Bishop of Bristol, in reply: I would like to try to remind Synod that the motion from the diocese of Bristol was asking for clarity about our understanding and practice (if that will be helpful) with regard to Christian initiation. Therefore I hope that Colin Buchanan will realize that there was a clear sound but it was not about which one we were going to choose.

First of all, I want to thank everybody for their contribution. We have had four, if not five, maiden speeches and that was a very important contribution to this debate, not least the stories of people's own experience parochially, but also about the problems that we find ourselves experiencing and the way in which we have to deal with them. I also would like to thank David Staple; he is going to solve one of my ecumenical problems later on with what he has said. I want also to thank the Bishop of Rochester and the Bishop of Portsmouth for their theological contribution to the debate.

Having listened to what people have said, it seems to me that there was a general feeling that we wanted to know where we are going to go in terms of our understanding of Christian initiation. It was interesting to note the first two speeches: Canon Brett wanted to make sure that we went in one direction, but he wanted to make sure that it was a particular direction, and Mr Betts also wanted to know that he was going in a particular direction but it had to be *his* direction. That sums up the debate that we have had.

I accept the Synod's decision that perhaps we need to spend a little more time monitoring, but in the meantime we need to think about how we are going to deal with things when we do make a decision, bearing in mind that, if it is to retain, the pastoral issues will be quite significant. I trust therefore that Synod will be willing to support the motion as amended, and I thank the Synod for all that it has done this morning.

The motion was put and carried in the following amended form:

'That this Synod request the House of Bishops to continue to monitor the implementation in dioceses of its 1997 guidelines on Communion before confirmation and to report back to the Synod by 2005, with a recommendation as to whether any changes in canon law are required as a result of developing practice and understanding in the Church.'

(Adjournment)

THE CHAIR *Canon Jane Sinclair (Sheffield)* took the Chair at 2.30 p.m.

The Chairman: Before we come to our next item of business, I would like to draw your attention to the sixteenth notice paper which lists both the results of uncontested