

# Reflections on the Workings of General Synod\*

PETE BROADBENT

Sometime Bishop of Willesden, in the Diocese of London

*This article is based on a paper delivered to the Ecclesiastical Law Society's day conference in 2022. It is a reflection on the workings of General Synod from the perspective of an author who has been a member of Synod for around 36 years. The article examines three discrete themes: (i) the problem of authority in the Church of England, (ii) the shortcomings of Synodical government, and (iii) the urgency of mission. It examines these themes by considering, among other things, the Church of England's response to a number of contemporary issues: its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, proposed reform of its governance structures, its ability to respond to issues concerning sexuality and racial justice, and the proposals for reforming the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, as set out in GS 2222.*

**Keywords:** authority, Church of England, COVID-19, General Synod, GS 2222, reform

## INTRODUCTION

‘The Church of England remains a truly episcopal church. It is still led and governed by its bishops, but the bishops act not in isolation but in partnership and constant dialogue with the clergy and laity through the synods of the church, and with their consent.’<sup>1</sup>

Those are the words of Colin Podmore in *Aspects of Anglican Identity*, a splendid expression of the ideal of episcopal ministry, but one which jars somewhat with our experience of the life of the contemporary Church of England in its current national and synodical manifestations.

This article is structured under three headings. They are: the problem of authority, the shortcomings of Synodical government, and the urgency of mission.

## THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

Basic to the conundrum that is Synod is the question of where authority lies in the Church of England.

It has been commonplace to argue that authority within the Church of England is a *dispersed* authority<sup>2</sup> – although it has been relatively impossible to tease out what that means in practice. Acceptance that scripture, creeds and

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1 C Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity* (London, 2005), 123.

2 See, for example, S Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London, 1995), 156ff.

articles are the bedrock—with both tradition and reason playing their part—does not help to locate the way in which authority is exercised in the councils of the National Church. The rather trite ‘episcopally led and synodically governed’ catchphrase is just that—a catchphrase, neither clause of which is entirely accurate. Our polity allows for bishops, clergy and laity to exercise leadership, and the Synod does not govern, although it might legislate for, the Church of England.

At the heart of this question of authority is a series of unresolved tensions: the bishops feel that they ought to be giving leadership as part of their *episcopate*—and often experience frustration when they cannot lead the Church in the direction they have discerned; clergy and laity often experience the bishops as exceeding their authority and not acknowledging the dispersed authority inherent in our structures.

Nowhere was this more evident than during the pandemic and the debacle over the closure of our churches. The diocesan bishops, aware of public health concerns and wanting to set a good example to those of all faiths (and probably aware of the scandal that might arise if one of our places of worship should become a ‘super-spreader’ location) issued an edict that our churches should be closed, and that clergy should not even enter them to pray. The letter issued on 27 March 2022, in the names of the archbishops and all diocesan bishops of the Church of England, addressed to all clergy, contained the following instruction:<sup>3</sup>

We are in a time of great fearfulness. The numbers of those becoming seriously ill and dying is increasing. It therefore remains very important that our churches remain closed for public worship and private prayer. The Church of England is called to model the very best practice. We must lead by example. Staying at home and demonstrating solidarity with the rest of the country at this testing time, is, we believe, the right way of helping and ministering to our nation. Therefore, for a season, the centre for the liturgical life of the church must be the home, not the church building.

In the Diocese of London, we tried to finesse this communication by allowing clergy to go into their churches alone, but pressure was put on us to withdraw that advice. Most of the communication on this between the bishops took place on their own private WhatsApp group.

It is of course clear (and was at the time) that the diocesan bishops had no power to require beneficed clergy to withdraw from their churches (the letter issued was later glossed as ‘advice’), and that the diocesans, not meeting as the House of Bishops, were not even a legal entity for the purposes of the action they

3 The letter is available at <[https://cofecarlisle.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2020/03/C-20200327\\_Letter\\_from\\_Archbishops\\_and\\_bishops\\_JCAzSpv.pdf](https://cofecarlisle.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2020/03/C-20200327_Letter_from_Archbishops_and_bishops_JCAzSpv.pdf)>, accessed 21 September 2022.

purported to be taking. Diocesan bishops, as a group, have no blanket authority to prevent clergy from carrying out their canonical obligations to make provision for morning and evening prayer to be said or sung, and for the celebration of Holy Communion in church, each Sunday and on principal feast days pursuant to Canons B11<sup>4</sup> and B14: any such power to dispense with this requirement is specific to the role of the ordinary in each diocese on a case-by-case basis (cf. Canon B14A). No canon provides the power to a bishop to prevent clergy from accessing their buildings without due process, and, again, to the extent that such a power exists (such as in the case of suspension under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003), it must be exercised on a case-by-case basis. The repercussions of this single action have arguably catalysed a greater level of mistrust of the bishops than has been seen for some years—and have played into the negative response on the part of the parochial clergy and laity to the tranche of reform proposals that has since emanated from the House of Bishops.

This does strike me as a particularly serious rupture of relationships. It eventuated in part from the hiatus caused by the pandemic. The House of Bishops was meeting more frequently. There was a lot of reflection on, and planning for, life in Church post-COVID. Work was already in progress on developing a *Vision and Strategy for the Church of England*.<sup>5</sup> This was joined by a series of other initiatives, including:

- i. *Transforming Effectiveness*—work with the dioceses to create a leaner and more affordable Church House, with the laudable aim of only undertaking that work at the centre which was absolutely necessary.<sup>6</sup>
- ii. *Bishops and their Ministry*—a survey of existing bishops to discover their understanding of how they exercised their calling and to make tentative proposals for a new shape to episcopal ministry and a rationalisation of dioceses.<sup>7</sup>
- iii. *The Governance Review Group* (to which I return later).<sup>8</sup>

4 For further discussion of the obligation to say morning and evening prayer, see R Dewhurst, “‘Seven whole days’: The Obligation of the Clergy of the Church of England to ‘say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer’” (2022) 24 *Ecc LJ* 14–24.

5 S Cottrell, *A Vision for the Church of England in the 2020s, ‘Christ centred and Jesus shaped. Simpler, humbler, bolder’: A commentary to accompany the picture*, November 2020, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/system/files/2020-12//A%20vision%20for%20the%20church%20of%20England%20in%20the%202020s%20-%20commentary%20by%20Stephen%20Cottrell.pdf>>, accessed 22 September 2022.

6 *Transforming Effectiveness. An introduction and update*, GS 2224, June 2021, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/GS%202224%20Transforming%20Effectiveness%20Update%20July%202021%20v1.pdf>>, accessed 16 September 2022.

7 cf. ‘Bishops and their ministry’, *The Church Times*, 12 February 2022, available at <<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/18-february/news/uk/bishops-and-their-ministry-full-document>>, accessed 16 September 2022.

8 *Report of the Governance Review Group*, GS 2239, September 2021, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/GS%202239%20Governance%20Review%20Group.pdf>>, accessed 16 September 2022.

It is worth reflecting on what these initiatives indicate about the mind of the House. Various, there is frustration about the state of the Church; possibly also anxiety about its future direction; and an impatience for change. On consideration, it is also likely that this raft of initiatives may have served further to destabilise the relationship of the Bishops to the Synod and the wider Church.

Yet the *Vision and Strategy* paper is probably asking the right questions. The main thrusts are that we should become a ‘*Simpler, Humbler, Bolder Church*’ for the twenty-first century:

- i. a church of missionary disciples where all God’s people are free to live the Christian life, wherever we spend our time Sunday to Saturday;<sup>9</sup>
- ii. a church where mixed ecology is the norm – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church to our parishes, schools and chaplaincies;<sup>10</sup>
- iii. a church that is younger and more diverse.<sup>11</sup>

The question is—does the House of Bishops have the authority to lead such a change? Is there an adequate acquiescence in their role (they are, after all, only a Synodical House and do not even represent the totality of the College of Bishops)? And is there, in Anglican polity, a clarity that such a top-down initiative can gather sufficient traction to win the hearts and minds of our Church? Or is the trust of the people of God in our Bishops irreparably damaged?

My perception is that trust has not entirely broken down, but that there does need to be some honest discussion about the ways in which we operate for the future and to seek a coalition of agreement about where we locate our understanding of authority over the coming years. We cannot renege on our self-understanding as the reformed catholic and episcopal church for the people of England. To express that in a simpler, humbler and bolder way requires some adjustment on all our parts.

For the bishops, I think it means that monepiscopacy has to go. Seating all the power and legal authority in one person (to the detriment of their episcopal colleagues and the governance of the diocese) is anachronistic and illogical. Recent events in the dioceses of Winchester and Chester indicate how fragile a construct it is—and also how difficult to unravel when it goes wrong.<sup>12</sup>

9 Cottrell (note 5), 2.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 3.

12 cf. ‘Dakin resigns from Winchester’, 16 July 2021, *Church Times*, available at <<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/23-july/news/uk/dakin-resigns-from-winchester>>, accessed 16 September 2022; and ‘Bishop of Chester Dr Peter Forster could retire before outcome of abuse

Bishops need to live and breathe collegiality, not just with each other, but with their clergy and laity.

For clergy and laity, both at national and diocesan level, it will require a new *concordat*, better methods of building trust and working together, allowing and facilitating the bishops to fulfil their role as set out in the ordinal, while not seeking to disqualify them when they seek to lead and manage the diocese, as though this were alien to their calling. To be a chief pastor and guardian of the faith on the one hand, and to be a leader and manager on the other, are only two roles in disjuncture from each other if you are a functional dualist in your theology of church and kingdom (and thereby implicitly acknowledge and endorse the oxymoron that there are areas of life which are *beyond* the Lordship of Christ).

### THE SHORTCOMINGS OF SYNODICAL GOVERNMENT

Pragmatically, of course, Synod is the only show in town—and, despite my comments about the question of authority, it does represent an expression of the exercise of dispersed authority which is part of our Anglican polity. The question is whether it can be made to work better.

Readers of this *Journal* hardly need reminding of the functions of General Synod as spelt out in its constitution:<sup>13</sup>

- (a) to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision
  - (i) by Measure intended to be given . . . the force and effect of an Act of Parliament, or
  - (ii) by Canon made, promulgated and executed . . . , or
  - (iii) by such order, regulation or other subordinate instrument as may be authorised by Measure or Canon; or
  - (iv) by such Act of Synod, regulation or other instrument . . . where provision by or under a Measure or Canon is not required;
- (b) to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest.

As we all know, the implication is that Synod is *primarily* a legislative body. But the rush for the tearoom when legislation comes on the agenda is always

cover-up inquiry', *The Chester Standard*, 21 March 2019, available at <<https://www.chesterstandard.co.uk/news/17517593.bishop-chester-dr-peter-forster-retire-outcome-abuse-cover-up-inquiry/>>, accessed 21 September 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Synodical Government Measure 1969, Schedule 2, para 6.

somewhat worrying, and the number of members of Synod who give time, effort and commitment to the detail of legislation has sadly diminished over the years. There is of course a need for a self-denying ordinance as well. The framing of legislation in complexity, where every ‘what if’ eventuates in the insertion of another clause ‘for the avoidance of doubt’ has plagued much of our drafting—and is one of the reasons why simplification continues to be necessary.

We do, however, have some good examples of more recent drafting which have avoided being over-prescriptive and eschewed complexity—I alight on the Cathedrals Measure 2021 as a good example of this.

When it has come to drafting legislation that is extremely controversial, I think there is further scope for finding creative ways to resolve deadlock, as we did with the Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure 2014 by setting in place a Steering Committee composed of those in favour of the principle behind the legislation and those opposed to it and thereby encouraging them to come to a consensus on what could be made to work. I would favour Revision Committees that are less adversarial; examination in grand committees rather than on the floor of Synod; and greater reflection on the end in view when drafting legislation.

If we can make Synod work better as a legislature, there are still questions to be asked about some of its other limitations.

### **The lack of time and capacity for informed debate and proper deliberation**

The pressure that the Business Committee is under to reduce costs and minimise the time that Synod spends when it meets has meant that the effectiveness of Synodical attention to business has been greatly reduced. It has also meant that legislation going through Synod can take anything up to two years before it receives final approval and becomes law. For example, the reform of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003, into which the working group of the Ecclesiastical Law Society has invested a great deal of time and energy,<sup>14</sup> is not likely to get to final approval stage until July 2023. Meanwhile many clergy continue to suffer because of the shortcomings of our existing provision and the litigiousness of other clergy and laity. We badly need to return to three Synods a year or to find some other way of progressing crucial legislation without skimming on proper scrutiny.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Final Report of the ELS Working Party Reviewing the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003’, 24 February 2021, is available at <<https://ecclawsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Final-Report-of-Working-Party-Reviewing-the-Clergy-Discipline-Measure-2003-1.pdf>>, accessed 25 September 2022. See also ‘ELS Working Party reviewing the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003: Interim Report’, September 2020, Annex 3, available at <<https://ecclawsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ELS-Interim-Report-revised.pdf>>, accessed 25 September 2022. On the proposed reforms to the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003, see further, P Collier KC, ‘50 Years of Safeguarding—950 Years of Clergy Discipline: Where do we go from here?’ (2022) 24 Ecc LJ 148–174.

Similarly, the cursory nature of many Synodical debates ('I intend to impose a three-minute speech limit from the start') tends to mean that it is impossible to develop an argument or expound a theological point. We have moved a long way from my early days on Synod, when Henry Chadwick and other distinguished scholars could intervene in a debate and bring clarity and historical perspective in a ten-minute speech. Synod has degenerated into soundbites. There is also a lack of engagement across the chamber. Speeches are episodic, delivered from prepared texts, and rarely engage with points made by previous speakers. Question Time (a litmus indicator of the lack of trust in the platform, and the bishops) has become more rancorous and the answers have become more evasive. If Synod is to serve the Church well, there is a need to change the way in which it operates.

### The House of Laity

We cannot continue to justify a House of Laity which carries such a democratic deficit in its electoral base. Deanery Synods make no sense as an electoral college for the laity. Ask yourself what attention the average Annual Parochial Church Meeting gives to the choice of those who will represent them at Deanery level. Sit through, if you can bear it, the business of the average Deanery Synod—characterised, as we know, by the description of 'a group of Anglicans waiting to go home'. Universal suffrage for the election of the House of Laity is perfectly possible in the age of developed information technology.

### Dealing with 'difficult' business

At present, we have at least three major issues which are occupying the mind of Synod, and which our processes seem not to be able to cope with.

The first is safeguarding. The platform tactic (from those leading debates and carrying forward the business of Synod) has been to attempt to keep questions about the Church's safeguarding practice, past and present, off the floor of Synod. Attempts to inquire the shortcomings of the National Safeguarding Team, the past failures of Bishops and the various 'lessons learned reviews' (from which we never seem to learn very much) have been seen off and resisted, leaving victims, survivors and those campaigning on their behalf with the sense that justice will never be done or seen to be done.<sup>15</sup> Synod's standing orders probably do not provide an adequate forum within which to scrutinise these concerns, but I suspect that this is one area of our national church life

15 See, for example, letters to the *Church Times* from A Graystone and D Lamming (22 July 2022), which are available at <<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/22-july/comment/letters-to-the-editor/letters-to-the-editor>>, accessed 21 September 2022; and the resource *Stones not Bread*, published by A Graystone, which is available at <<https://abuselaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Stones-not-Bread.pdf>>, accessed 21 September 2022.

where we need to set up better ways of processing these concerns. They won't go away.

Secondly, there is the *Living in Love and Faith* process.<sup>16</sup> The bishops of the Church of England invited church communities from across the country to use the resources to learn together, to listen to one another and to God. Everyone who took part was encouraged to share their insights, stories and reflections in order to contribute to the bishops' discernment about matters of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. This has been an extraordinary exercise in listening, producing good materials and taking Synod (and the whole Church) through a learning experience. What is less obvious is the end in view, with participants and observers on both the conservative and reformist ends of the spectrum suspicious that a rabbit will be plucked out of the hat at the end of the process, but having no clue what the rabbit will look like.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, there is racial justice and *From Lament to Action*. In June 2020, the Church of England's House of Bishops agreed to the creation of an Archbishops' Taskforce, which would lead to a Commission. They mandated these groups to implement 'significant cultural and structural change' on issues of racial justice within the Church of England. In their statement announcing the Taskforce and the Commission, the House of Bishops stated: 'For the Church to be a credible voice in calling for change across the world, we must now ensure that apologies and lament are accompanied by swift actions leading to real change.'<sup>18</sup> But as Lord Boateng said to Synod: 'The most chilling thing about this report, the most concerning thing about this report, are the appendices, the long lists of previous recommendations which have not been implemented, promises made that have not been fulfilled. It is chilling, it is wounding, it is a scandal, and it has to be addressed.'<sup>19</sup>

The common factor in all these three areas is that Synod does not have a clear means of deciding where it wants to get to, by when, and by what process. We do not do good process and we do not plan for the outcomes. Setting this in place

16 See <<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>>, accessed 16 September 2022.

17 See, for example, the different responses from the Church of England Evangelical Council, which are available at <[http://www.ceec.info/uploads/4/4/2/7/44274161/gospel\\_church\\_\\_\\_marriage\\_-\\_preserving\\_apostolic\\_faith\\_and\\_life.pdf](http://www.ceec.info/uploads/4/4/2/7/44274161/gospel_church___marriage_-_preserving_apostolic_faith_and_life.pdf)>, accessed 21 September 2022; and from C Coward in his blog, 'LLF: it's long, complex, and fails LGBTI Anglicans', *Unadulterated Love*, 10 November 2020, available at <<https://www.unadulteratedlove.net/blog/2020/11/10/llf-its-long-complex-and-fails-lgbt-anglicans>>, accessed 21 September 2022.

18 'From Lament to Action, The Report of the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce', 4, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf>>, accessed 17 September 2022.

19 cf. *ibid.*, 60–99; and the Church of England press release, 8 February 2022, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/lack-action-racial-justice-chilling-lord-boateng-tells-synod>>, accessed 17 September 2022.



should fall within the remit of the Archbishops' Council and or the House of Bishops, but there is a lack of leverage, determination and resolve within the system. Any solution to this problem requires a coherent resolution of the issue of authority discussed above.

### The wider governance question

The Governance Review Group, of which I was a member, was asked in December 2019 'to review the effectiveness of the governance structures, processes and activities for and across the national functions of the Church of England, and to make recommendations to the Archbishops for possible changes to improve the functioning and effectiveness of those structures and relationships.'<sup>20</sup> The implicit presenting issues were twofold: an understanding that, post-pandemic, the shape of the National Church Institutions (NCIs) could not remain the same, and a less loudly voiced opinion that the Archbishops' Council and all the associated substructure that had been put in place following the Turnbull review *Working as One Body* in the 1990s were no longer fit for purpose.<sup>21</sup> We set to work under a tight reporting deadline, painfully aware that a report ostensibly seeking merely to address structures and propose better ones was actually going to stir the pond and disturb the delicate eco-system that is the Church of England and the General Synod.

Let me expand on that. There is nothing wrong with seeking to achieve better governance. The Turnbull reforms were neutered on their passage through General Synod through a rearguard action, principally orchestrated by and on behalf of the Church Commissioners, leaving the NCIs with a complex and incoherent governance structure.<sup>22</sup> Our report seeks to remedy that by putting in place a more unified governance structure. But because the Church of England is not an organisation but an institution—a web of complex interest groups, a coalition of church 'tribes' ranging from traditional catholics to conservative evangelicals and taking in modern catholics, middle-of-the-road Anglicans, mainstream evangelicals and charismatics on the way—governance must be able to accommodate that eco-diversity (and any model will be viewed with suspicion by one party or another if it does not do so).

20 *Report of the Governance Review Group* (note 8), 6, para 1.

21 *Working as One Body* (London, 1995). The Turnbull Commission was created after steady over-commitment of the historic endowment, by the Church Commissions and the wider Church, led to an inflated income requirement and disastrous investment decisions, which came to a head in the early 1990s. As the Governance Review Group noted (note 8), 20, para 73: 'This was widely seen as evidence of inadequate governance structures and the Turnbull report's diagnosis remains strikingly familiar. In particular it noted that there was no single vision and that no single body had overall responsibility for making decisions and developing policy (especially financial), and that the multiplicity of autonomous bodies created confusion and duplication'.

22 *Report of the Governance Review Group* (note 8), 20, para 75.

I am indebted to Malcolm Brown, who produced a really helpful paper for the Governance Review Group—*Theological Reflections on Structure and the Church of England* (September 2020)—which I hope could be made more widely available. In it, he says: ‘...deliberately seeking to promote ecological adaptation is a delicate task. That is, emphatically, not to argue that change is too difficult to contemplate. But the real danger is in working with an oversimplified view of the ecology itself and its context, especially imagining that concentrations of power are always better than complex and complementary power relations.’

The indicative models of new structures that the Governance Review Group has produced *might* produce simpler and more streamlined structures. But changing structures will not necessarily address the complexities of the ecosystem.

### **Ecclesiological questions**

If we take the idea of a diverse ecosystem seriously, there are implications for the way in which we structure a governance that will work for all; put simply, because there is no shared unitive ecclesiological model around which all Church of England ‘tribes’ can unite.

Turnbull backed the ‘body’ metaphor.<sup>23</sup> Many conservative evangelicals major on the definition from article 19 of the 39 Articles of Religion ‘a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance’. Catholics objecting to what they see as inappropriate management-speak will assert the priority of the sacramental mystery of the Church. None of these is wrong. The ecclesiological basis on the Church of England and the models within which that basis plays out produces what amounts to a shared misapprehension of the position and motivation of the other tribe—and with it a mistrust of the other tribe. On this basis, governance may never find an agreed and shared framework within which to operate.

### **THE URGENCY OF MISSION**

We are at a point in the life of the Church of England where numerical decline cannot be ignored. Even before the pandemic, the 2019 Statistics for Mission flagged a ten-year 17% reduction in weekly attendance (and a 30% reduction in child average Sunday attendance).<sup>24</sup> It is neither anxiety nor scaremongering that leads many to argue that the Church of England could be reduced to a rump of attenders through decline and age demographic within two generations.

<sup>23</sup> *Working as One Body* (note 21).

<sup>24</sup> *Statistics for Mission 2019* (London, 2020), 16 available here <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>>, accessed 23 November 2022.

The approach of the *Vision and Strategy for the Church of England* is surely therefore worth a little more consideration than the dismissive comments it receives on social media.<sup>25</sup>

I share the underlying doubts that a national strategy can make a difference on its own—but I do think that we need a re-energised approach at parish and diocesan level, from the bottom up, informed by a coherent, over-arching, vision and strategy.

My approach to the whole simplification process has been to liberate mission and evangelism where our current structures inhibit it. So, I would want to press the point that we need to make possible a renewal of the parish and a fertilisation of the new—a both/and, not an either/or.

The Diocese of London paper on mixed ecology church says this:<sup>26</sup>

It is taken as read that the manifestations of church which we seek to build and develop must be in continuity with the reformed catholic heritage of the Church of England, based in the faith “revealed in the holy scriptures, and set forth in the catholic creeds, to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness.” These are communities of the baptised where word and sacrament are faithfully proclaimed and celebrated, under the leadership of their Bishop and in communion one with another.

The Church of England’s understanding of how its mission is expressed has always been based on a sense of place, with the parish system and our commitment to the cure of souls made explicit in every service of collation or institution to a benefice. There has, however, always been diversity of provision—cathedrals, peculiars, chapels, extra parochial places, and of course, in London, Guild Churches! The models we spell out in this paper merely build on that diversity. Such diversity is of course not a goal in itself—our goal is to ensure that there is a witness to Christ in every place and an opportunity for all people to hear of Christ and the gospel, become part of a community of faith and access the word of God and the Sacraments. We want to ensure that there are effective churches and other ecclesial units in every community, whether old parish churches or new ones, ancient forms or modern expressions.

I look to those of us who are committed to a legal framework for the Church of England that facilitates mission and enables good change processes to put

<sup>25</sup> See Cottrell (note 5).

<sup>26</sup> ‘2030 Vision: People Strategy: Models of Church and Models of Ministry’, posted on my blog on 18 September 2022, <<https://petebroadbentmusings.blogspot.com/2022/09/>>, accessed 21 September 2022.

our energy into policies that will enable this mixed ecology vision. That will include some of the proposals that have been vilified on social media—changes to the Mission and Pastoral Measure (as proposed in GS 2222),<sup>27</sup> to the ways in which clergy hold office, to the ministry of lay people, to the way in which our Bishops are deployed, to our ministerial training and deployment patterns.

We cannot face the challenges of twenty-first century ministry and mission. Good law enables good change processes. Old and badly drafted law does not tend to facilitate anything much—apart from frustration. As set out in the executive summary of GS 2222, the following reforms are suggested:<sup>28</sup>

- i. possible changes to where decision making, review and appellate functions should lie;
- ii. reduction in the number of different processes;
- iii. reducing the number of consultation stages;
- iv. possible limitations of rights of representation or appeal;
- v. omitting the requirement for Church Buildings Council reports ahead of church closure proposals;
- vi. providing for an interim or alternative status to churches being ‘open’ or ‘closed’;
- vii. simplification of the requirements around the future use of closed churches and dealing with disturbance of human remains;
- viii. the processes around clergy dispossession;
- ix. a single simpler provision for suspending/restricting rights of presentation;
- x. more limited options for patronage provisions for new benefices;
- xi. abolition of sequestration.

The reason, of course, that the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 and the GS 2222 recommendations have become such a touchstone of controversy is that it has become a lightning rod for fears about change, about the future of the parish system, and about our church buildings. Yet the current Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011’s procedures and processes are so ponderous that it is not really fit for purpose. But what if it were to be recast so that it became not a ‘top down’ threat but a ‘bottom up’ legal enactment—enabling parishes and communities to discuss their own proposals for their future, laying out with honesty the financial and staffing opportunities and constraints—a Pastoral Mission Measure? The new Measure does not have to be something

27 ‘Church of England Mission in Revision: A review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011’, 14 June 2021, GS 2222, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/GS%202222%20-%20Mission%20in%20Revision%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20the%20Mission%20and%20Pastoral%20Measure%202011.pdf>>, accessed 17 September 2022.

28 *Ibid.*, 5.

that is '*done to*' a parish. Let it be reshaped into a '*done with*' mechanism for enabling mission and growth. And yes, in some cases, death. But beyond death there is always resurrection.

## CONCLUSION

In this article I hope that I have at least indicated some of the unresolved issues that should occupy Synod and the NCIs over the coming years. We probably will not find answers to the questions about authority. We may not be able to address all the shortcomings of Synod. But I hope that we will at least journey on into God's future determined to work together for the good of his Church, the advancement of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Kingdom, and the salvation of the people of England.