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Anglicans reject compromise over women bishops

Al Webb Religion News Service | Jul. 13, 2010

LONDON -- The Church of England's General Synod on Saturday (July 10) rejected a compromise proposal by its top two bishops that would have allowed individual congregations to ?opt out? of having women bishops.

The move was an embarrassing setback for Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and his chief deputy, Archbishop of York John Sentamu, who had hoped to head off a defection of traditionalists over the issue of women bishops.

Under the archbishops' plan, congregations that objected to female bishops would be permitted to have a male bishop officiate at key ceremonies where a bishop's presence is required.

Advocates for women bishops objected to the plan, saying it would create a two-tiered leadership structure that would deem women prelates somehow inadequate.

The controversy over female bishops has dominated the five-day gathering of the General Synod, the church's national assembly, in York.

The compromise was seen as a last-ditch attempt to avoid a schism that some fear could lead to the defection of perhaps hundreds of traditional Anglican clergy, taking with them thousands of worshippers, to the Roman Catholic Church.

The rejection of the two archbishops' plan effectively leaves the church on the same path to the eventual consecration of women bishops -- but not until 2014 as ?the earliest possible time.?

Since 1994, some 5,000 women have been ordained priests in the Church of England. In 2005, church leaders approved, in principle, the idea of women bishops. Work on legislation to codify women bishops began two years ago.

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