



a “new fast moving industrial revolution”, Synod hears.

Geoff Crawford / Church of England

The Church of England's General Synod has publicly affirmed the place of work as a key component in "human flourishing" in an era when Artificial Intelligence is driving a "new fast moving industrial revolution".

A debate heard that work has been a vital "God-given" element of human life since the Garden of Eden but is being transformed through the combined impact of global factors from the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic and inflation to the rise of the gig economy and AI.

Synod overwhelmingly approved a motion brought by the Diocese of Oxford which affirmed the "dignity and value of purposeful work – whether paid or unpaid" – amid rapid changes in labour markets across the world.

Introducing the motion, the Bishop of Oxford, Steven Croft, said: "For a Christian work is central for human flourishing and not just an economic issue.

"We were placed in a garden and charged with a God-given task from the very beginning.

"Work is related intimately to human dignity and purpose.

"Work is more than just the tools we invent or master. Work is more than just a means to earn a wage.

"The theological value of work faces new and powerful challenges and needs to be articulated afresh in the public square.

"To give the most current example, data scraped from the world wide web often disregards copyright or intellectual property rights, folding individual examples of human craft and creativity so deep inside a black box that proving theft is beyond most individuals.

"A new fast moving industrial revolution is gathering pace, without safeguards to protect human purpose and dignity in work, let alone agreement about how to share the inevitable costs alongside the undoubted benefit."

He added: "The type and quality of work is changing - millions of humans are now doing the jobs we always thought machines would do, while computers seem to do creative tasks we associate with human flourishing.

"But there is a hidden human infrastructure underneath this AI."

He gave examples of so-called "ghost work" performed by humans to service AI – such as people in developing countries working, often on low wages, to carry out data labelling for chatbot systems and the way in which workers in mainstream jobs face surveillance embedded in the IT tools they use at work.

Amendments to the motion included one brought by Rebecca Chapman, a lay member from the Diocese of Southwark, endorsing the living

wage. And the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, brought an amendment endorsing the Rome Call for AI Ethics – a call signed by the Pontifical Academy for Life in Rome, together with leading technology firms and the Italian Government's Ministry of Innovation, published in February 2020 to promote an ethical approach to artificial intelligence.

Archbishop Justin spoke of science and technology as “a lion that can and must be tamed for the common good of the world”.

“We have an important role to play in helping the world to deal with this lion, but also the depth of resources and reflection to provide a valuable contribution at a crucial moment for global society,” he said.

“The pace of change is startling.”

Notes to Editors

The motion was passed overwhelmingly by a show of hands.

The motion, agreed, including amendments, was as follows:

That this Synod:

mindful of the deep economic effects of the pandemic, the impacts of new technology, and the global rise of new forms of working

- A. affirm the dignity and value of purposeful work, whether paid or unpaid, as a significant component of human flourishing;
- B. endorse the Rome Call for promoting an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI);
- C. endorse and commend the five principles used for evaluating fair and dignified platform work in the gig economy by fair work;
- D. encourage all parishes, benefices, dioceses, cathedrals, Theological Educational Institutions and other Church of England organisations to implement, at a minimum, the living wage for employees and to have a regard for work/life balance and dignity at work; and
- E. call for the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) together with Mission and Public Affairs Committee to advise on what is essential to purposeful, dignified, and fair work in the context of the fourth industrial revolution now in progress including specific advice on how these changes impact the work of women and to look at Biblical wisdom on work, employment and economy in its widest sense; and to consider a range of practical solutions from recent economic thinking in harmony with the Christian tradition's emphasis on grace, justice and mercy, such as questions around pay ratios within organisations, Basic Citizens' Income, poverty and wealth lines, to strengthen our Christian voice in the public square as a Church.