

A REPORT ON THE FIFTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF FORWARD IN FAITH

25 - 26 SEPTEMBER, 1998, IN LONDON

by the Rev. Canon Paul C. Hewett, SSC

Introduction

On Monday, September 21, the Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, Canon Geoffrey Neal and his father, Sir Leonard Neal, and I, set out for London from St. John the Baptist, Marshall, Virginia, to attend the Fifth National Congress of Forward in Faith. It was fortuitous that I had visited St. James the Less, Philadelphia, the evening before, where the Episcopal Synod of America had a regional meeting and Evensong. The Rector, the Rev. Dr. David Ousley, SSC, gave an excellent talk on communion with one's bishop, and how that communion has been broken in dioceses like Pennsylvania, and how faithful Anglicans must find ways to realign into orthodox provinces.

It was very good to go to London with Canon Neal, because as one of the founders of Forward in Faith, he knows all the leaders and is in frequent contact with them. It would be helpful to be introduced to them, and to swap notes.

Our participation

On the morning of the first day, The Rt. Rev. John Broadhurst, Chairman of Forward in Faith and Bishop of Fulham, welcomed the two of us warmly and appreciatively, and invited me to address the Assembly on the subject of the Province of Christ the King. I spoke of my work years ago in the Diocese of Southwark with Canon Neal, and about our life these past twenty years as a free Province in America. Our Province decided early on not to interfere in England, but to focus entirely on the United States, with special emphasis on training and mission. Priestly formation would come through our Seminary in Berkeley, St. Joseph of Arimathea, founded right at the beginning by our Archbishop. The Permanent Diaconate was restored, a simple and effective canon law was drafted, our headquarters were established in Washington, D.C., a policy of restraint in ordinations and consecrations was insisted on, some exciting youth work was launched, and a missionary spirit was fostered in building new churches all across the land. A significant number of our priests are in the SSC, and we have good relations with parishes of the Episcopal Synod in the Philadelphia metropolis and elsewhere. Finally, we are looking for ways to establish the Religious Life in our midst.

This address, and Canon Neal's introductions, opened the door to many informal meetings in the pub across the street, with bishops, clergy and lay delegates, including the Scandinavian delegation. Here are brethren who now have their backs right up against the wall; some of them have already lost their livings and urgently need episcopal oversight, now that Bishop Gartner in Gothenburg is so frail.

At numerous points in our informal conversations, the Seminary in Berkeley was highlighted as meriting the attention of ordinands throughout Great Britain. There is much that Forward in

Faith can learn from our Archbishop's twenty years of leadership in building up an excellent Seminary and Province.

The event

The Assembly was convened in the Camden Centre by Bishop Broadhurst, who again made an appreciative reference to the Province of Christ the King. Bishop Broadhurst seemed to have just the right touch in handling the weighty matters before this quite large Assembly. Fr. Geoffrey Kirk was not only the Secretary but also the strategist behind the scenes, sharp as a tack. One was immediately impressed by how well organized and unified Forward in Faith is, how smoothly its sessions were conducted, how well thought out its goals and sense of mission, and how determined the delegates. In the course of two days over 600 delegates and observers must have taken part, representing perhaps 300 parishes. There were four Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs, or "Flying Bishops"), numerous regional deans of Forward in Faith, some Sisters of St. Margaret from Walsingham, Sister Marianna from Sweden (influential in restoring the Religious Life there), a delegation of the Episcopal Synod of America, large numbers of SSC priests, and a sizeable delegation from Sweden and Norway. All five existing provinces of Great Britain were represented.

What Forward in Faith is

Forward in Faith emerged in 1993 in the wake of the Episcopal Ministry Act of the General Synod of the Church of England. This Measure is a compromise resulting from the catastrophe of November 11, 1992. Just how the leaders of Forward in Faith got the Measure through Synod is an amazing story and a *tour de force*. As a compromise, the Measure does not give the orthodox everything needed for full and continuous life in the Body of Christ. It was a way of buying time and providing episcopal oversight for the orthodox, in return for recognition of the existing hierarchy in matters temporal.

The situation in the Church of England as a state church is different from our own, and complicated in different ways. Unless it is disestablished, the Church of England can only function under the law. Forward in Faith is using the benefit of establishment to get what they want, and that is to take their buildings and assets with them. The gnostics are pressing hard for women bishops, which will undo the 1993 Measure. And so Forward in Faith wants to present the case for a free province, all assets intact, as the kind of compromise that Parliament insisted on in 1993, since Parliament does not want to take responsibility for the collapse of the Church.

Everyone in Forward in Faith recognizes that the 1993 Measure is untenable with the impending consecration of women as (gnostic) bishops. So everything necessary for a free Province must now be put in place -- a Province entirely separate, self-governing, orthodox, and with its own archbishop, in every respect like the Province of Christ the King. This new Province would in effect be the 6th Province in Great Britain (the other five being Canterbury, York, Scotland, Wales and Ireland), and it would relate, or not relate, to other Anglican provinces, depending on their orthodoxy. When the (then) Diocese of Christ the King became a national diocese in the early 1980's, it in effect fulfilled the role of a 10th Province of Episcopalians. This is demonstrated today by the Flag of the Province of Christ the King, which

is the Flag of the Episcopal Church, with the Seal of the Province emblazoned in the lower right quadrant.

What the Assembly resolved

Forward in Faith is working to set up all the infrastructure necessary for a free province: its own archbishop, college of bishops, synod, boundaries of new dioceses, regional deans, training of ordinands, and a definite proposal to present to the Church of England (see Appendix, Resolutions 98/01 and 98/02). One thing Forward in Faith should do immediately is to train men to be layreaders and permanent deacons in all the parishes, to build up the leadership at the local level. The best men will not enter the courses held by the gnostic dioceses.

There is a steady increase in parishes signing up with Forward in Faith. But the liability of the present situation is the compromise that was made to get "flying bishops," the tie that still connects Forward in Faith with existing diocesan bishops, who have jurisdiction over most temporalities. The appended proposal deals with how this might be resolved, once for all, by a strategy that in effect uses the opponents' own weapons against them.

The Assembly met in high spirits to pass a number of resolutions, but what was most significant was the unanimous and enthusiastic passage of the two resolutions appended below: to receive, for discussion and dissemination, the document, "The Case for a Free Province." The mood of the Assembly was that the utmost zeal and skill is now needed. The timing of the necessary initiatives will be critical and there are many obstacles and pitfalls ahead. But there was no one who protested the logistical difficulties. The sense of the meeting was that we must go forward no matter what the cost. It is entirely possible, given Forward in Faith's imaginative, steadfast and unified leadership so far, that orthodox Anglicans in Great Britain have entered a distinct new phase -- a turning point -- that warrants our close attention and help.

The second day began with a great solemn Mass which completely filled the vast and splendid church which has been all but handed over to Forward in Faith as a Cathedral - in - waiting in Gordon Square, London. This building is named the Church of Christ the King. We can hope that the correspondence of this name with that of our Province may turn out to be yet another aspect of God's Providence in our common pilgrimage.