

**A REPORT ON THE FORWARD IN FAITH, GREAT BRITAIN
SACRED SYNOD AND ASSEMBLY
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by the Rev. Canon Paul C. Hewett
Rector, Church of the Transfiguration, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

Introduction

This year I went to the meetings in London with our parish's newly ordained deacon, John Richards, who was visiting England for the first time. We left Philadelphia on Tuesday evening, October 15 on the all night flight to London, arriving at 6:30 a.m. We wearily made our way from Heathrow Airport to Westminster, to the Emmanuel Center, where the meetings were scheduled. A nearby restaurant served us a full English breakfast. The Sacred Synod convened that afternoon, and we met up with Father Geoffrey Neal to try to stay awake and dig in to the work at hand.

Perhaps 300 clergy were gathered from across the United Kingdom. After two days of Synod, on Wednesday and Thursday, the Assembly would meet for two days, Friday and Saturday. Attendance at the Assembly was higher, with perhaps 400 clergy and half that number of laity, and the international component in place.

The Sacred Synod

The issues dealt with were social justice, ecumenical relations, the pastoral realities of marriage and divorce and a theological understanding of our mission. Father David Houlding, Master General of the Society of the Holy Cross and Chairman of the Catholic Group in General Synod, issued a challenge "for graciousness and sacrifice." In the various presentations there was a vague drift into the malaise that we should, in the end, work within the system and take whatever crumbs fall from the establishment's table. Father Geoffrey Kirk saved the day by making a stinging, prophetic, inspiring and much-needed rebuke against the spirit of complacency. We must stay the course and fight hard for the new Province, no matter what the cost.

The gist of his remarks was that, without a new Province, everything in the end will unravel and fizzle. The gnostic establishment will have won the day, and will marginalize and eliminate all opposition. We must redouble our efforts for the new Province, because time is running out, and we may not even have three or four years to finish putting it all in place. If the plan for the new Province cannot be passed in Synod and Parliament, then we must take the law into our own hands, and claim our share of the assets. If that fails, then we must, in the new Province, stand anyway, and build from scratch and worship, if need be, in living rooms and garages. After this magnificent speech Bishop Broadhurst said that if Father Kirk had not made it, that he would have. He backed him up 100%.

After Evensong at Westminster Abbey we were able to venerate the Shrine of St. Edward the Confessor and visit the Chapel of St. Faith, a little-known refuge for pilgrims.

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For lunch on Friday, Father Neal invited me to join him and Bishop Keith Newton and Father David Wastie (Rector of our Parish in Winchester, Virginia, St. Michael's). Bishop Newton is the youngest flying bishop, consecrated to replace Bishop Edwin Barnes. We would try, next time Bishop Newton is in the United States, to have him meet our youngest Bishop, Robert Waggener, for lunch.

The Assembly

The International Conference came first. Father Roald Flemestad reported on the Nordic Catholic Church in Norway. It was recognized that there will be no repentance or renewal of the Church of Norway, so the Free Synod was disbanded, now that the Nordic Catholic Church is in place. Growth has been slow, but there is a sense among the clergy and laity that they have come out of prison. The Roman Catholic Church in Norway has been hostile, but the Ecumenical Patriarch sent his blessings in a letter from his Sacred Synod.

Fr. Goran Beijer gave the report for the Free Synod of the Church of Sweden. The picture this past year has been bleak. Although there are bishops abroad who are willing to take on a missionary diocese, numerous priests have voted the idea down. There will be one more massive rally next month in Norkoping, a kind of farewell to Bishop Gartner. On the bright side, work goes forward on the *koinonias*, the independent eucharistic fellowships, and there is the possibility that a dozen or more priests could be rallied into a missionary diocese.

There were reports from Wales and Scotland (where F in F needs sharper and more positive definition), and Australia (where thorough-going division reigns in General Synod, and on the other side of the fence, the TAC Bishop is doing solid work).

For the United States, I spoke on the Province, and the chronic need over the years to respond to colonies of refugees and exiles from the Episcopal Church, scattered across vast expanses of territory; the Province has been fundamentally a lay-movement, looking for priests and bishops to shepherd them. Whatever tragic divisions ensued, we were seeking, in our various jurisdictions, to minister to a complex diaspora of refugees. As Father Sam Edwards was being driven out of Christ Church, Accokeek, to sign up with us, it was becoming crystal-clear that any place for Catholic clergy in the Episcopal Church was rapidly diminishing, and that the Province is a necessary way forward. I described my meeting with Father Edwards three weeks ago, to assure him of a financial safety net, and thanked the Assembly for all the financial support from many quarters during the past year. Father Edwards and his people define why we are here.

The past year has seen a much more cordial and helpful relationship between the Province and the Anglican Catholic Church. The archbishops have been meeting and good working relationships are growing at the parish and diocesan levels.

Bishop Jack Iker and Father David Moyer both gave excellent talks on what has happened to date in Forward in Faith North America. Father Moyer's description of his ordeal in Rosemont over the past year was warmly received by the Assembly. It was noted how vulnerable each man

is, and what encouragement we must all give not only for escape parachutes, but for a positive way forward, into the wilderness and toward the Promised Land. The Saturday Solemn Eucharist at Christ the King, Gordon Square, was splendid. Close to six hundred must have attended. Father Beau Brandie's sermon on Mary was magnificent. Canon Geoffrey Neal was installed as the Regional Dean of the Great Ouse (roughly the area between Peterborough and Bedford). Back at Emmanuel Centre there was a short address by the eminent Roman Catholic Dominican theologian, Aidan Nichols, thanking us for our witness, for fidelity and courage. With our kind of Anglicanism, faithful to "the Great Tradition, the Paradosis of apostolic Christendom...the ecumenical road (of Rome breathing again with Constantinople as the two lungs of the Universal Church) is...shorter and more secure."

Hard decisions lie ahead of you. The Rome that sent Augustine, Hadrian and Theodore, an Italian, an African and a Greek, to England, still shows, despite or because of cosmopolitanism, a motherly solicitude for you. But behind a Church-mother there stands, even more importantly, the Mother of the Church. I hope that the Mother of the Lord will throw her mantle over you in the difficult years that may lie ahead – for yourselves, your families, and your fellow-faithful. We know that the Lord Jesus did not simply enroll Mary among the apostles but set her at his right hand, clothed in splendour, as a lamp to enlighten the whole house. No Christian will ever attain her stature; in the Church that acknowledges her, no woman need ever feel abased.

There were reports on youth work and women bishops, then elections, and the Chairman's Address, by Bishop John Broadhurst.

Conclusion

At the end of every day's session, Father Neal, Deacon John Richards, Bishop John Richards and I trekked back to Stanmore on the tube, and from there drove up toward St. Peter's Bushey Heath (25 miles northwest of central London). We went to the Sung Parish Mass at St. Peter's, where Father Robbie Low's sermon is always a spiritual treat.

I want to thank our hostess, Enid Short, of St. Peter's, who put me and John up in her guestroom, and saw to it that we got rested up, and to thank the two retired Church Army workers, Ruth Duxbury and Irene, who served us an elegant Sunday dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and a list of vegetables, desserts and wines too long to name, followed by naps by the fire, English pipe tobacco, Evensong at St. Alban's Cathedral, a chance to venerate the Shrine of St. Alban, and a pint in an old pub in St. Alban's. By far the best pub we visited was the Swan, near St. Peter's: a small but very real neighborhood pub, for a pint of Young's best bitter, the best beer in the world. One of the patrons got us set up for a rugby match next time we come.

Monday was for sightseeing: Churchill's bunker and the Tate Gallery. Father Neal drove us to the airport on Tuesday so we could sum up the whole week. To me the best parts were crucial updates from Scandinavia, Father Kirk's rousing speech to go forward with the new Province, no

matter what the cost, Bishop Broadhurst's firm resolve for the same thing, Father Neal's appointment as a Regional Dean, the possibility that an English flying bishop can link up with one of our bishops, Father Aidan Nichols' address, and Deacon John Richard's exposure to the issues of the wider Church. He and I want to thank everyone back home who made this trip possible: our own people, who so graciously let us go, and who, with Deacon Harold Minor, held the fort and kept the wheels turning here.

This year the Province was represented by four people: Father David Wastie, from Winchester, Virginia, Father Geoffrey Neal, who recently was both there and in Marshall, Virginia for five years, and Deacon John Richards and myself, from Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. I would hope that next year we can add more clergy to our representation, and perhaps some laity and bishops, because it is so important that the links we forge will extend, and the support we lend one another, strengthen. There is no substitute for building real working relationships with one another. The great battles ahead will require that we have real working relationships with one another; each of us has something vitally important to share with the other, as we set out, as the Church, to re-evangelize Europe and North America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.