

CHURCH AND KING

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NATIVITY OF KING CHARLES

Saturday 19 November 1994

St. Katharine Cree,
Leadenhall Street,
City of London.

12 Noon. Holy Eucharist.

Preacher: Rev. Prof. Roy Porter

Please note revised arrangements and support this service if you can

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1994.

The A.G.M. this year took place on Saturday 28th May at the Church of St. Mary-le-Strand, by kind invitation of the Church-wardens. Solemn Eucharist was celebrated at 11.30 a.m. by the Chairman, Fr. Barrie Williams, who also preached. After the meeting, members retired informally for lunch. It was good to see more faces at the meeting this year. I hope we have now found the best time for the A.G.M. a Saturday at the end of May when we can celebrate the joyful restoration of Church and King and share fellowship after settling the Society's business.

I must draw members' attention to three items raised at the meeting

(1) The invitation to members to write in expressing their views on the 'ordination' of women to the priesthood evoked only a handful of responses. It may be that many members are

uncertain about this matter, or are hesitant in expressing their views. The view was expressed at the meeting that with so much uncertainty surrounding the Church itself at this time, we should be wise to tread carefully. I would, as your Chairman, nevertheless urge all members to commit so important a matter to your earnest prayer so that we may know, both individually and as a Society, how we may be faithful to the witness of the Royal Martyr. (2) The meeting approved unanimously the following statement: 'Membership of the Society is open to communicant members of churches in the Anglican Communion and those in the historic Anglican tradition'.

(3) For some years now, communicant members of non-Anglican churches have been admitted to the Society as Associate Members. The time has come when we should consider admitting them to full membership. There are only a small number of people involved, but they include some whose membership is very much valued. It will be for the 1995 A.G.M. to give approval or otherwise. If any members are against such a move, they should make their views known to the Chairman or one of the Officers or Committee members in good time before May 1995. Members from non-Anglican churches would, of course, be expected to be in sympathy with the aims and objects of the Society.

Concern was expressed at the meeting regarding proposals to be brought before the General Synod to allow lay celebration of the Eucharist. I can think of nothing which would be more contrary to everything that King Charles lived and died for, or, come to that, everything that Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley and the other Tudor Reformers stood for. I take personal responsibility for the statement, but I believe that the Society will support me overwhelmingly in saying it.

Barrie Williams.
Chairman.

THE FESTIVAL 1994

Hereford Cathedral. It gives us great pleasure to note the observance of the Festival at Hereford Cathedral on King Charles's Day itself. At Choral Evensong, the preacher was a very faithful member of our society, Prebendary Andrew Talbot-Ponsonby. The meeting was followed by tea in the College Hall with an address by Dr. John Tomlinson, Headmaster of the Cathedral School, on 17th Century Kingship. It is good to note the high profile given to the Festival in one of our oldest and loveliest cathedrals.

Whitehall. Following our usual custom when King Charles's Day falls on a Sunday, the commemoration was kept on the morrow, Monday 31 January, in Whitehall. The Chairman, Fr. Barrie Williams, hung the wreath beneath the Royal Martyr's bust, following the traditional prayers. Fr. Royston Beale assisted at the prayers and also at the Solemn Eucharist which followed in the Banqueting House; Fr. Williams celebrated and Fr. Paul Lansley acted as deacon. As always, a choir from King's College, London, led the singing with a beautiful rendering of the service. I should like to express our thanks to the Royal Palaces Division for allowing us the privilege of using the Banqueting House. The Royal Martyr sermon was delivered by Sir Leslie Fielding, KCMG, a life member of our society and a lay reader. It is printed in full below.

Barrie Williams.

AUSTRALIAN NEWS

The Brisbane Mass on St. Charles' Day was offered in St. Peter's church, Southport, on the Gold Coast some 50 miles south of Brisbane City. Some fifty worshippers gathered at the church in the evening of the Festival at which the Rector of the Parish (Fr. Raymond Smith) celebrated and the Australian Secretary of the Society (Fr. Reg Mills) preached the sermon. A supper in the canal-side home of some parishioners of St.

Peter's provided a pleasant end to the celebration as worshippers enjoyed one of those balmy evenings for which Queensland coastal districts are well-known.

In Sydney, the Society's Mass took place in suburban St. John's Church, Gordon, where the Rector celebrated and Fr. John Bunyan preached the sermon. His somewhat-better-known ancestor may not have agreed with all of its conclusions. The Mass was held on the eve of the Festival (29th January) and was followed by a lunch at a nearby restaurant.

Reg Mills.

"TO PLAY THE KING"

This winter, the BBC ran a political thriller on television, entitled "*To Play the King*". Those who watched it were well entertained. In the Manichean tradition of Light versus Darkness, but without the comfort of a Happy Ending. The fictitious British Prime Minister was a renaissance monster of the School of Machiavelli. At the end of the series, he appeared to have prevailed over his well-intentioned but naive and injudicious monarch.

But it was the King that held the viewers' sympathy; and, as the last frame faded on the screen, one felt that the final word had still to be said; that good might yet come from evil. Was this out of mistrust of political leaders, of whom the general public are said to believe almost anything? Perhaps. Was it because of the viewer's susceptibility to the kingly bearing, community spirit and personal courage of the suppositional King Charles III? Very much so.

We were back, in a way, in 1649. There is an innate authority to the anointed wearer of the Crown of England which continues to impress, even in 1994. All the more so, for the fact that nobility and grace are virtues little cultivated, and not so often witnessed, in today's public life.

My theme this morning is Kingliness: the personal qualities of the Royal Martyr which spoke to his age and speak to our own; the qualities which have moved Anglicans to commemorate him faithfully, across three and a half centuries.

As it happens, the Society of King Charles the Martyr celebrates its 100th Anniversary this year. It was not founded by Victorian Churchmen in a politically atavistic spirit. King Charles was not seen as the Avatar of a temporarily abandoned but nevertheless still valid constitutional principle of state.

Late 19th Century historians knew that the King, as a secular ruler, had made serious mistakes: he mishandled Parliament. and the Scots; he lacked political even-handedness; and was, at times, intolerant. In France, the failure of the first "*Fronde*" led on to the absolutism of Louis XIV and ultimately to the horrors of the French Revolution; but, in England, a timely compromise between monarch and parliament and people was to permit the governance of these islands to evolve. Thus, as many Victorians saw it, King Charles had, in a sense, to die in order that Victorian constitutional monarchy might one day live.

In retrospect, a comfortably "Whiggish" view of history that, in the light of subsequent social change and institutional decay in Britain.

But there was also, in 1894, a spiritual "spin" to the matter. What impressed our founders was that this monarch, unlawfully executed by fanatics, had met his death ultimately because of his principled defence of the Church of England. In so doing, and whatever his infirmities of secular judgement, the King had carried imperishably with him into eternity the attributes and qualities of Sainthood.

The Victorians were, of course, plagued in their day by Church troubles not completely dissimilar to our own: they found it as difficult to puzzle through the theological implications of Darwinism as we do those of Genetic Engineering; they wrestled with free-thinking Liberalism, as we with "Non-Realist" free-thinking; the tension between their "High" and "Low" parties is matched by that between today's "Open Synod" Group and those who continue to hold fast to Scripture and Tradition.

Yet late nineteenth Century Churchmen knew at least two things when they saw them, and valued them more than some people today. One was personal holiness: the Oxford Movement had seen to that. They also, in their majority, saw a sturdy and workmanlike tool of God's Grace in the anvil of a firmly embedded national church, reformed yet catholic, scriptural and scholarly, yet with social outreach and evangelical concern. This doubtless seemed to them to be what King Charles I had wished to order, when he spoke of the need to "Keep the Middle Way". This ecclesiastical precept of the Royal Martyr was therefore - and should still remain - a healthy and natural manifestation of Anglicanism; of the English sense of what to hang on to, in a world which must otherwise know perpetual change.

I come then to Kingliness, and the instruction today of Charles' personal carriage in 1649.

Time travel, mercifully, is beyond the reach of mortal men. But if Charles I were nevertheless to be able to revisit this country now, one of the things which might surprise him is that we have,

in one respect, abandoned Galileo and become the inhabitants of a "flat earth".

It had been evident, long before Mr. Michael Portillo's speech two weeks ago, that the notion of a "station in life", and of social hierarchy, has gone completely. The monarchy has been demystified, and even made subject (albeit, on the Sovereign's own initiative) to income tax; grandees, whether Archbishops or Prime Ministers, University Vice Chancellors or red robed judges or landed Dukes, no longer impress in the way they once did. Traditional respect for rank or office has evaporated. Authority in matters of faith and morals, where still asserted from above, is often disputed or merely disregarded from below.

We have all lost a great deal, as well as doubtless won a little, from these curious changes. In a confessionally confused nation, ancient words have lost their meaning; the Faith has been relativised; Religious Education in schools, diluted and neglected; standards of conduct have lost their former objective foundation. While much instinctive moral decency remains, the anvil of the Established Church has taken a beating.

Nor has Liberty been matched by any very solid fraternity. Even if the average working citizen contributes £13 per week to the welfare state, the unemployed remain for him or less automatically "scroungers". As for Equality, a new pantheon and pecking order is in the process of construction: he who walks tall - who enjoys "street credibility" - is the one with "loads of money"; while media personalities, playboys and sporting prodigies occupy the new high ground.

In such a setting, life has become particularly difficult for political leaders. They are subject to generally low popular esteem; to leaks of confidential memoranda; and to the "trial-by-media" of all aspects of their lives. Furthermore, their working conditions are poor; their tenure insecure; their families often separated from them for long periods. The Westminster model which the Victorians admired no longer impresses. Parliament itself seems due for reform. Politicians therefore need, more than most of us, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, as well as the tolerance and understanding of the electorate. Nevertheless, in the light of the Martyr's example, there are one or two things which stand out clearly.

It is a sad spectacle when Ministers cling over-tenaciously to office; and finally surrender it with so little grace, as if the portfolio were a personal perquisite. It is some time now since we have seen the dignity and self-sacrifice of Peter Carrington, when he offered himself as a scapegoat for Galtieri's occupation of the Falklands.

Again, to quote last week's "Economist" British voters "are unimpressed by the way MPs

conduct themselves in the House of Commons". In my view, most people accept that politics is a tough business; and that constructive tension between government and opposition is a democratic imperative. But too much time is devoted to rubbishing and sneering, not only across the floor in the house, but even between erstwhile political partners in self-exculpating and narcissistic best-selling memoirs.

It is a further illustration of the times that, in some sections of the Conservative Party, the impression has somehow got around that if people have made a million or two, they are serious; if they have opted for a civil service career, they must be spineless "Wallies"; if they are social workers or Lecturers in Sociology, then they should probably be under surveillance by Stella Rimmington; if they are Bishops or clergy, they are likely to be ill-informed lobbyists who would do better to concentrate on the Ten Commandments - and keep politics and poofers out of the pulpit, on pain of disestablishment.

I exaggerate, grossly, to make my point. Nevertheless, one of the few consolations at Blackpool last autumn, for a Churchman representing his Constituency Association there, was Mr. Douglas Hurd's speech in defence of little people and the public services.

Then the current controversy over "Back to Basics", which would have left Charles I completely baffled. Most will agree with Lord St. John of Fawsley - a previous preacher to the Society of King Charles the Martyr - when he argues in "*The Times*" that a free society must also be "a spiritual and moral enterprise". As most people see it, first, some actions are just wrong; and, second, reasonably high standards in public life must be set and adhered to. Cannot that be the end of the matter? Why should family values, and personal morality, be subject of so spectacular a tussle of one-upmanship between Left and Right and Centre, between and within the Parties?

And what, in a Christian Society, about Christian forgiveness? If Suffolk Woman and South-gate Man hate sin, cannot they also love the sinner? King Charles did not ridicule his opponents or abuse his captors; rather, he explicitly and publicly forgave them.

But among the elite, and in the media, and on the streets of contemporary Britain, we now live in what "*The Tablet*" has called a "Culture of Contempt". Not even the monarchy is removed from this abrasion; not even an Archdeacon can resist the temptation to pass public judgement on the suitability of a future King and Supreme Governor of the Church of England - all on the basis of media surmise, cloaked as truth.

Happily, there are lights as well as shadows in the

chiaroscuro of contemporary "flat earth" public life - lights which reflect, in their way, some of the qualities of the Royal Martyr's own personal example. Among party political leaders, despite failings, we have a Paddy Ashdown's honesty and directness; the sturdy earnestness of a John Smith; the receptiveness and human decency of a John Major. At another level, and in the Church of England, the biblical spirituality and the acute scientific mind of her respective Archbishops. In the Royal Family, the grace and courage of an unflinching Prince of Wales, in Australia. At the apex of the realm, the quiet dignity and devotion to duty, inter annos horribiles, of Her Majesty the Queen.

And so back to Charles I, not as a fallible statesman, but as a timeless spiritual example. He could probably have avoided execution, if he had been prepared to give ground on Episopacy; a timely Erastian formula which set aside the Apostolic Tradition might have purchased physical survival. But his decision, as he subsequently declared it on the scaffold, was that "I die a Christian according to the profession of the Church of England, as I found it left me by my father". And, having formed that decision, he "carried the can", displaying a calm acceptance of the consequences of his actions. There was no sign of cowardice, or sudden access of wingeing. No bombast, or orgy of self-justification. No "memoirs" either. He played the King, to the end. Precisely because he unfeignedly believed the Holy Gospel, his public death was of a piece with the serenity and holiness of his private life. There took place no "conjurer's trick with dry bones". Nothing more happened, on the face of it, than the separation of the head of a mere man from his shoulders, just outside one of the windows of this Chamber. But that man's faith and conduct had so transformed him, that he bore, at the last, the unmistakable imprint of Christ's own example. Thereby was born, in the Yeatsian sense, a "terrible beauty", which has ever since haunted the English conscience.

May the Kingliness and Grace of Charles I be an example to public life in modern England. May the King and Martyr pray with us, and with the entire Community of Saints, for the safe-guard of the Church for which he died; and for the continued proclamation of the Good News of Christ to all who dwell down here below, on the contemporary flat earth.

LESLIE FIELDING KCMG

Delivered in the Banqueting House,
Whitehall 31 January 1994