

THE MAKING OF THE AFFIRMATION OF ST. LOUIS

Magna Carta of Continuing Anglicans

From an article by (the late) Perry Laukhuff which appeared in the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen (FCC) journal, "The North American Review"

The Affirmation of St. Louis is the Magna Carta of Continuing Anglicans. Its lifetime has been too short for accurate and objective judgement of its importance - and I am too prejudiced an observer to make such a judgement. In my own mind, I tend to think of it almost as in a class with the Creeds and the articles of Religion. Almost all the Continuing Church bodies have claimed it as one of their cornerstones. More competent voices than mine have praised it in the highest forms. For example, the Eastern orthodox quarterly review, Doxa has called the Affirmation "an amazing document" and one that is 'very close to an Orthodox Confession of Faith.' To read it quickens the spirit. What, then, are the origins of this moving proclamation, this great charter of our continuing faith?

On September 14-16, 1977 there took place at the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, a gathering known as the St. Louis Church Congress. This meeting had been called and announced almost a year earlier by the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen (FCC). This Fellowship was a coalition of fifteen Episcopal publications and organisations and one publication and one organisation from the Anglican Church of Canada. The idea had originated with the Reverend Canon Albert J. duBois in 1973 in preparation for the Louisville General Convention of the Episcopal Church. He rightly saw such a coalition as the best means of rallying the loyal orthodox elements of the Church in opposition to the controversial proposals which were expected to generate much heat. Foremost among these were revision of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer and ordination of women to the sacred ministry,

...From its beginnings, the fellowship debated with growing concern and intensity the course it should follow if heretical and apostate forces won the upper hand in the Episcopal Church. FCC members sought to coordinate their actions and publicity with one another and from time to time the fellowship issued to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church or to the Church at large, statements intended to boost morale, intensify and unify opposition to the growing threats of heresy, clarify its own position and keep alive the hope of preserving traditional Anglicanism.

After the defeat of the traditionalists at Minneapolis, attention was focused strongly on what the practical response should be. It was determined that a Church Congress should be convened in September 1977. The FCC also came to a unified view that nothing but an organizational separation from the Episcopal Church would answer the need caused by that Church's theological separation from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

It would appear that the seed of the "Affirmation" idea was sown at the Nashville meeting of the FCC on November 4th and 5th, 1976. There was a long, informal and at times almost

anguished discussion of possible future courses of action. Bishop Clarence Haden, of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, who was present as a visitor, threw out the idea that the FCC must profess specific and unswerving basis for its stand if it were to lead a movement to set up a Continuing Episcopal Church. Dr. Harold Weatherby, of the Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer, took up this theme by saying that we must set forth the principles on which a Continuing Church would be based and do it soon. The public statement released by the FCC following this meeting indicated that the FCC had commissioned the drafting of a statement of moral and devotional principles upon which a Continuing Church would be based.

It was from these tentative and somewhat unspecific beginnings in Nashville in November 1976, then, that the Affirmation grew. The drafting committee met several times during the spring and summer of 1977. It was against a confusing and exhausting background of months of struggle that the Drafting Committee successfully completed its labours. At the final pre-Congress meeting of the FCC, less than twenty-four hours before the Congress opened, there was presented for definite consideration a complete draft of the Affirmation of St. Louis. After several hours of deliberation, the draft was approved unanimously with some amendments. It was read out to the 1,800 attendees at the Congress, heard with rapt attention and received a standing ovation. There was no debate or discussion. The Affirmation was simply promulgated. Nothing quite like it, to the best of my knowledge, had ever evolved in 450 years of Anglican history.