

**FORWARD IN FAITH
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY 2018**

ITEM 7: THE SEAL OF THE CONFESSIONAL

Fr Paul Benfield to move, on behalf of the Council of Forward in Faith:

‘That this assembly

- a) Call on the House of Bishops to re-affirm the Seal of the Confessional as an essential principle of the doctrine of the universal Church, as received by the Church of England, and
- b) Call on Society priests to reassure the faithful that they will maintain absolute confidentiality with regard to what is confessed in sacramental confession.’

In proposing this motion on behalf of the Council of Forward in Faith I am not doing anything novel or new. This is an essential principle of the doctrine of the universal Church. It is not some doctrine invented by high-church Anglicans or anyone else. It existed in the pre-Reformation Church in England and thus was and is part of the law of the land. It was incorporated into Canon 113 the Code of Canons of 1603, the unrepealed proviso of which remains in force. It was incorporated into the ordinal of 1662 which is still an authorised liturgy of the Church of England.

Dr Podmore’s paper details the rather complicated legal and political advice which the Crown lawyers gave in the late 1950s when the canons of the Church of England were being revised and explains why the new canons do not include what was originally proposed as Clause 5 of Canon B28 of the Revised Canons.

Archbishop Fisher said in 1959 in his presidential address to the Convocation of Canterbury ‘the seal is an ancient and universally-held principle not only of the Church of England but of the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church as well’.

The next day the Convocations passed unanimously resolutions which became Acts of Convocation, the wording of which is on the back of Dr Podmore’s paper. Both Convocations reaffirmed as an essential principle of Church doctrine that if any person confess his secret and hidden sin to a priest for the unburdening of his conscience and to receive spiritual consolation and absolution from him, such priest is strictly charged that he do not at any time reveal or make known to any person whatsoever any sin so committed to his trust and secrecy.

This motion simply calls on the House of Bishops to reaffirm what was expressed in 1959 and which has been an essential part of church doctrine of the Universal Church since before the Reformation, and it calls on Society priests to reassure their people that they will maintain absolute confidentiality with regard to what is confessed to them in sacramental confession.

I move the motion standing in my name and urge that it be passed without dissent.