

The Douglas Brothers and the Society of the Faith

A Talk Given to the Anglo-Catholic History Society – 10.06.19

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I hope you're at least dimly aware of the Society of the Faith. We've had a fairly low profile in the last fifty or sixty years, but it's starting to come up again; and I'm delighted to have been asked to talk to you about who we are, what we do, and what we hope for.

The Society of the Faith was founded in 1905 by two bachelor brothers, the Revd John Albert Douglas and the Revd Charles Edward Douglas – well known in their day as prominent exponents of the Anglo-Catholic cause, but now largely forgotten. Early last year, the Society of the Faith wondered about commissioning a biography. Following a suggestion from the Revd Dr Bob Reiss, one of our Trustees, I got in touch with Dr Andrew Chandler, Professor in Modern History at the University of Chichester. (You may know his admirable book, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century: The Church Commissioners and the Politics of Reform, 1948-1998*, or his biography of Bishop George Bell.) Professor Chandler already knew something of the Douglas brothers, but was keen to see what more he could dig up.

Alas, he found very little biographical material, either in the Society's own archives or in Lambeth Palace Library – not nearly enough for a proper biography. Still, we now know a little more, which I shall summarise for you. (I am much indebted, both to Professor Chandler, and to Dr Andrew Hopley, our Principal, who did his own researches whilst creating the Society's web site.)

John Douglas was born in 1868, and his brother Charles two years later. Their parents are known to have lived in Cowes. John went to school at Chatham House and Dulwich College, and then attended the University of London, where he gained a 1st Class BA in 1890. Ordained deacon in 1894 and priest in 1895, he served curacies at Newark (from 1894), Penge (from 1897) and St Stephen's, Lewisham (from 1901). In 1904, he went to Constantinople as Acting Chaplain at the British Embassy, returning to London two years later. It was during this period, in 1905, that his brother Charles founded the Society of the Faith, with John as its first Principal.

John's interest in Orthodoxy continued to grow. In 1906, he helped found the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, and also the Society of St Willibrord. He was always interested in the Eastern Churches. From 1922-36 he served as Librarian of the Archbishop's Eastern Committee, and in 1935 became General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for

Foreign Relations, a post he held until 1945. He attended Oecumenical Conferences in Stockholm (1925), Lausanne (1927), and Oxford and Edinburgh (1937). In 1915 he wrote an illustrated booklet on Russian Orthodox worship.

John Douglas was an active player in the University of London: a Member of the Senate from 1907, Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 1931 and Chairman of Convocation and Member of the University Court from 1939 – all alongside an active career as a parish priest.

From 1907, John was Curate at St Benet's and All Saints', Kentish Town. In 1909 he became Vicar of St Luke's, Camberwell; and then, in 1933 he moved to the City of London as Rector of St Michael Paternoster Royal and St Martin Vintry with All Hallows, Great and Less. He retired from this post twenty years later, in 1953.

During the Great War, John Douglas was Chaplain of the First Surrey Rifles Territorial Army, and lectured in France. In 1925, both brothers played a key role in organising a service in Westminster Abbey on 29th June, to commemorate the 1600th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Representatives of all but one of the Eastern Orthodox Churches were present, together with those of many other Churches. After the service, there was a splendid banquet at the Holborn Restaurant, at which William Palmer, 2nd Earl of Selborne, presided. (Selborne, 1859–1942, was a very senior Conservative politician.)

On the back of this occasion, the Nikaeian Club was founded in 1926 to assist the Archbishop of Canterbury with oecumenical entertaining. The brothers played an important role in this for many years, and the Society of the Faith supported the Nikaeian Club with regular grants. (We don't know for sure, but strongly suspect, that the Douglas brothers were 'gentlemen of independent means'. They seem to have subsidised a good many ecclesiastical projects.)

In the inter-war years, John organised ecumenical lectures at St Mary-le-Strand. In 1932 he was appointed a Royal Chaplain. He died in 1956, distinguished and full of years.

Charles Douglas's career was equally distinguished. He went up to St John's College, Cambridge, graduating in 1893. He was an assistant master at Worksop College from 1895 to 1900, and then at Bedford Grammar School. In 1902, he returned to London as a master at Dulwich College. In 1913, he became his brother's curate at St Luke's, Camberwell; and, as I've said, it was he who founded the Society of the Faith in 1905, which he served as Bursar until his death in 1955.

Charles's interests, however, ranged right across the Church. You will know that the 'Enabling Act' of 1919 created Parochial Church Councils and the Church Assembly. Charles served as Chairman of the House of Clergy in that Assembly – though exactly when I have not yet discovered.

The brothers intended The Society of the Faith to be what its Memorandum and Articles describes 'an Association of Christians in communion with the See of Canterbury for mutual assistance in the work of Christ's Church and for the furtherance of such charitable undertakings as may from time to time be decided upon, more especially for the popularisation of the Catholic faith.' John Douglas was Principal for fifty years, from its foundation until 1955, the year of his brother's death. He was succeeded as Principal by the Bishop of London, William Wand.

Very early on, the Society of the Faith spawned two important commercial offshoots: Faith Press and Faith Craft. It was Charles who conceived the idea of printing of Sunday School stamps, to encourage children's attendance at church. That venture, instantly successful, soon led to the foundation of Faith Press, which became a major publishing enterprise, with its own press at Leighton Buzzard. By the time Faith Press was wound up in 1973 (a decision today's Trustees much regret), it had published several thousand titles, including quite a lot of music – not least, for the Royal School of Church Music and the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society. More about Faith Press later.

Faith Craft set out to supply high quality church furnishings at prices most 'ordinary' parishes could afford. The firm drew on a remarkably distinguished range of artists, craftsmen and architects, to whom work was contracted out. You can see examples of Faith Craft's work all over England; but, until quite recently, no very comprehensive catalogued was available.

However, in 2012, Dr Julian Litten, the Society's last Principal, began compiling a list, to which we've been adding ever since. Then, in 2014, the Society sponsored a Symposium on the work of Faith Craft at St George's Headstone, Harrow. The papers given there were collected in one of our recent publications, *All Manner of Workmanship* (the title of Faith Craft's 1954 Catalogue). As far as we know, this is the only serious overview of Faith Craft's work. I'm sure you have all seen examples, perhaps without knowing their provenance.

In his forward to *All Manner or Workmanship*, Dr Litten wrote as follows:

What was it that made Faith Craft unique, and why is it not more widely known amongst the ecclesiastical *cognoscente*? Almost everyone has heard of Percy Dearmer and his Warham Guild [founded in 1912], and of the Society of St Peter & St Paul [founded in 1911] and their association with Martin Travers, the ‘high priest’ of Roman baroque, beloved of those of the ‘biretta belt’, so why is it that Faith Craft does not have similar recognition?

Part of the reason is Faith Craft’s clients. The Warham Guild provided fixtures, fittings and vestments for those of the English Missal brigade; the Society of St Peter & St Paul served the *outré* establishments of those Anglican clergy associated with the Roman Missal, whilst Whippells of Exeter were seen as ‘safe hands’ for providing ecclesiastical supplies to those [who were simply] of the ‘high church’ persuasion. Faith Craft did not appear until [just after the First World War], by which time the Anglican Church had settled down as far as political parties were concerned, and thus Faith Craft was not invented to serve any particular faction.

Dr Litten continued:

Yes, there was a strong Travers influence in some of the pieces designed by John Crawford and Francis Stephens in the late 1940s and 1950s, but this is not surprising when one realises that Crawford was for many years Travers’ chief assistant and Stephens, who became the chief designer at Faith Craft, had been taught by Travers; yet it would be wrong to say that Faith Craft was Travers’s successor. Faith Craft existed to provide high-quality items of hand-made furnishings in English oak, exquisite stained glass, excellent textiles and embroideries and innovative silver-smithing to the discerning client looking for quiet, unostentatious works of the utmost elegance. It was this self-effacing approach which denied them that fame which the more combative church furnishing movements actively sought.

The Society’s book *All Manner of Workmanship* includes an index of churches where Faith Craft work can be found – and (as I’ve said) further examples keep turning up.

The architect most closely associated with Faith Craft was probably Laurence King. King was himself a Trustee of the Society of Faith for many years. His philosophy was very much that of the Society, and *vice versa*. Dr Litten quotes King’s *credo* in his forward. King wrote:

It is traditional to be modern, and for the artist to concern himself with ‘period design’ in ecclesiastical matters is not only completely contrary to the Christian past but is entirely at variance with the idea of the Living Church which is day by day giving new life to our souls. At the same time the artist and the designer must on no account turn his back on the past, but with the profound knowledge of tradition he must in all humility carry on the great heritage of Christian art undisturbed by all fashionable whims whether they be of the past, present or even future. He must be free from and above all style, since style or fashion can no more exist with art than it can be with the Church, which is the living Body of Christ and therefore eternal.

King went on:

The Liturgical Movement has influenced all Christian design in both Roman and Anglican Communion by demanding true functionalism and strict obedience to rule, whilst at the same time encouraging complete freedom of artistic expression by those who are believers in the Christian faith.

The work of Faith Press is less well documented. This is largely due, I’m afraid, to a period of mismanagement by the Society in the 1970s, when the Trustees (the ‘Court of Fellows’) all became elderly and tired together, and lacked the energy or vision to look to the future. They decided to wind up both Faith Craft and Faith Press. Times were changing, and what had once been commercially viable seemed less so. But – far worse – they decided to ‘tidy up’ the Society’s archives. Most of the Faith Press publications (of which there was then a pretty complete set) went into a skip. So, too, did many irreplaceable drawings and designs by Faith Craft architects and craftsmen. Today, we find it hard to forgive such contempt for the future; but we’ve been trying to re-acquire as many Faith Press publications as we can find – on line, in second hand bookshops, or in private libraries; but it is slow work.

I’m sure the Douglas brothers would have been as appalled by this vandalism we are. And I fear we must point the finger – at least in part – at the Society’s then Secretary, Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, who seems to have run the Society of the Faith as his own private fiefdom.

However, one long-time Trustee of the Society of the Faith, Mr Martin Woods, knew Ivor Bulmer-Thomas quite well, and insists that he was an inveterate hoarder, averse to throwing anything away. Mr Woods finds it hard to believe it was Bulmer-Thomas who ‘ditched’ the Faith Press and Faith Craft archives; he thinks it far more likely that disgruntled members of the then staff were responsible. It does seem to have been a period characterised by some

bitterness, the details of which are now forgotten. I've even learned that someone poked out the eyes of John Douglas's portrait in Faith House; if you look closely, you can see that the painting has been restored.

The Society of the Faith was not the only project dear to Bulmer-Thomas. For example, he was one of the founders of Friends of Friendless Churches, and was the first Chairman of The Redundant Churches Fund (now the Churches Conservation Trust). He'd been converted to an Anglo-Catholic stance in his youth; and when plain Ivor Thomas married into the Bulmer Cider fortune, he was able to indulge his enthusiasms to the hilt. I met him just once, a long time ago (he died in 1993), at a talk-dinner at the Athenaeum. We sat opposite each other, but did not exactly 'converse'. I remember him talking throughout dinner – with much enthusiasm, yes; but I sensed that he would not brook contradiction, or even interruption, especially from one so much younger!

Still, it was Bulmer-Thomas who invited Watts and Company to take up residence in the basement of our building, Faith House – No. 7 Tufton Street, just behind Westminster Abbey. Typically, the Society's arrangements with Watts were at first what one might call 'a little casual'; but Watts have been delightful and valuable tenants, and are of course far better known than the Society itself.

In 1935, the Society somehow acquired the long lease of Faith House. (It's a very long lease: there are still some 900 years to go!) The building was designed by Edwin Lutyens as a church hall for St John's, Smith Square; the freehold is owned by the Church Commissioners.

Faith House provides not just the Society's home, but its main source of income, from rents. As well as Watts in the basement, the ground floor – once the Church Union Bookshop and then SPCK – is now occupied by the National Churches Trust (formerly, the Historic Churches Preservation Trust). An accountant has offices at the top.

Other tenants, such as Open Europe, have come and gone. It is occasionally suggested that the Society should divest itself of such a valuable asset (not least because it's very expensive to maintain); but if we did so, Faith House would revert to the Church Commissioners and we would lose our primary source of income. I can say with confidence that we are there to stay!

I ought to add that Ivor Bulmer-Thomas was not the only sometimes 'difficult' individual in the Society's history. When the somewhat eccentric Peter Moore, Dean of St Albans, was Principal, the Trustees met on several occasions, not at Faith House, but in the Athenaeum!

Also, amongst the nuggets Dr Chandler turned up in his researches on the Douglas brothers, there is a private letter from Cosmo Gordon Lang to the Bishop of London, dating from 1937, in which Lang complains that Charles Douglas could, when the mood took him, be exceedingly difficult! Just one example: in 1921, Charles Douglas ‘formally delated [the Revd Henry] Major [Principal of Ripon Hall] to the Bishop of Oxford on a charge of heresy, accusing him of teaching a doctrine concerning the Resurrection contrary to the Christian faith as set forth in the Creeds and in Holy Scripture.’ After consulting four prominent theologians, the Bishop rejected this charge. [*Arthur Caley Headlam: Life and Letters of a Bishop* by Ronald Jasper, Faith Press, 1960, page 133.]

I suspect that John Douglas could also be ‘difficult’. Jasper, in his biography of Headlam, refers to John as ‘really a most effective intriguer’. [*Ibid.* p. 228] Both brothers were prominent and effective players in a wide range of Church affairs, and did accomplish a very great deal; but both were strong-minded individuals, and probably used tactics which today would seem little short of bullying. But perhaps that’s the way such people ‘got things done’!

It must be said, however, the Douglas brothers’ unquestioned respectability ensured that the Society of the Faith and its offshoots, Faith Press and Faith Craft, were widely seen as the ‘acceptable’ face of Anglo-Catholicism right through the 20th century. Remember that in the 1920s, Anglo-Papalists such as Fr Fynes Clinton at St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge, aroused grave suspicion amongst more moderate high churchmen, not to mention Anglicans generally. In fact, John Douglas was pointedly critical of what he saw as Fr Fynes Clinton’s liturgical excesses – although he did serve with Fynes Clinton on various committees. By contrast, Faith Craft was actually commissioned, in the 1950s, to design an altar cross and candlesticks for the Royal Household. Artists more closely linked with Anglo-Papalism would hardly have been thus favoured, especially before the accession of King George VI, as Queen Mary was known to be unsympathetic to Anglo-Catholic worship.

John Douglas’s name appears in the minutes of many different bodies, but there is a maddening lack of personal detail. He seems to have been self-effacingly efficient in all he undertook. As I’ve already mentioned, I have found one thing he wrote on the web: a long Introductory Note to *Pictures of Russian Worship*, published by Faith Press in 1915: http://anglicanhistory.org/orthodoxy/douglas_worship/.

When talking about the Society of the Faith, I am often asked, ‘What do you actually do?’ I always start by saying, ‘Well, a lot more than we did thirty years ago!’ We make grants for various projects. When the Liddon Trust was wound up a few years ago – after the clergy house

at the Grosvenor Chapel was reclaimed from them by the Diocese of London – their remaining assets came to us. As the Liddon Trust once did, we host an annual Lecture, and also give grants to young post-graduate students of theology. Recent Liddon Lectures can be found on the Society's website. We've just had an excellent talk by Fr Peter Groves, Vicar of St Mary Magdalen Oxford, on the relationship between Henry Liddon and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The Society has also, in a modest way, begun publishing again. Over the last two decades, we've brought out several books, and we are always glad to receive submissions of manuscripts to consider for publication. We have issued Michael Yelton's *Anglo-Papalism* (2005), Paula Gooder's *The Meaning is in the Waiting* (2008), John Gunstone's *Lift High the Cross: Anglo-Catholics and the Congress Movement* (2010), Robert Reiss's *The Testing of Vocation: 100 years of ministry selection in the Church of England* (2013) and Margery Roberts' *Church Linen, Vestments and Textiles* (2015). This is a wonderfully practical guide to the care of altar linen, with such essential details as 'how to iron a corporal' – all illustrated with line drawings by Fr Nicholas Elder. (Faith Press published something similar in 1932, but it was seriously out of date: for example, there was no mention of synthetic fabrics.)

Another of the Society's publications in 2015 is a kind of curiosity, rather in the manner of Colin Stephenson's *Walsingham Way*. This is Julian Litten's book *The Mystery of Marquis d'Oisy*. Dr Litten has had a lifelong interest – almost an obsession! – with the 'Marquis', and this delightful little book reflects a lifetime's ongoing research.... And then, in 2016 we brought out Michael Yelton's *Martin Travers: His Life and Work*.

I've already spoken of our 2014 Symposium on Faith Craft. At the end of 2017, we held another Symposium, this time at Southwark Cathedral, on 'Catholicity in the Church of England'. This was based on a Report of the same title commissioned by Geoffrey Fisher in 1946. The group that produced the Report was chaired by Michael Ramsey, then van Mildert Professor at Durham; the secretaries were Gregory Dix of Nashdom and Fr Hebert of Kelham. Others members included T. S. Eliot, Eric Abbott, Harry Carpenter, Austin Farrer, and eight others of that calibre. Their Report is a remarkable document, largely forgotten today, but still pertinent to the life of the Church. The Society intends to publish the papers from this 2017 Symposium very shortly – at least initially, on line.

The Society's largest expenditure over the last two decades has been, perforce, the restoration and maintenance of Faith House. The Trustees who wound up Faith Press and Faith Craft in the 1970s also neglected much basic work on the fabric. It has been a major task to bring Faith House 'up to scratch'; but this is essential if we are to have good tenants – who, after all, are

our major source of income. As with many Lutyens buildings, there are ongoing issues with drains and rain water. The roof will need replacement fairly soon; the boiler is nearing the end of its life. Local flooding in Westminster has caused some big problems. The saga never ends....

Our membership today is only about sixty-five. ‘What,’ you may ask, ‘are the advantages of joining?’ Frankly, the tangible advantages are few. Apart from our AGM, there are not many occasions when members gather together. There is the Liddon Lecture, the occasional symposium, book launches at Church House bookshop, and occasional outings to see some gem of church architecture associated with Faith Craft. But our members, wherever they are, all share the Society’s mission to promote a catholic understanding of the Faith amongst Anglicans, knowing they have the support of good allies. Perhaps, in an era of seeming evangelical ascendancy, this is more important than ever.

I have been a Trustee from 2000, and Vice-Principal since 2002. Thinking of our Memorandum and Articles, I feel sure we could do much more to ‘popularise the catholic faith’; but in today’s world and today’s Church, this is not a straightforward task. Our recent Symposium on Catholicity was but one small step towards meeting this challenge.

Inevitably, this task is complicated by differing catholic views on the ministry of women. The Court of Fellows has been careful to tread lightly here, ensuring that those of every view can feel respected, and can all work together. The Society has no ‘official line’, but chooses to focus on what unites catholics, rather than what can seem to divide them. Our Trustees themselves hold differing views on this subject. Keeping the balance is not always easy; but we feel it is important to do this if we are to speak with a strong united voice.

The talk will include photos of the portraits by William Lawson of the Douglas brothers which hang in Faith House (their only known portraits); and here is a web link to the best list we have of Faith Press publications: [Faith Press books at FH July 17](#). I also append a list of all our Principals – a remarkably distinguished lot. Our present Principal, Dr Andrew Hopley, much regrets that he cannot be here this evening.

The heyday of Anglo-Catholicism may be past; but catholic faith, catholic theology and catholic Church order are still (we believe) profoundly important for the health of the Church. Catholicism needs to be much better understood. If the Society of the Faith has an ‘identifiable posture’, it might be summarised thus: Catholicity is not primarily about what you wear, or whether you use incense, or any other ‘second order’ matter. It is about what you believe –

about God, about Jesus Christ, about the Sacraments and the character of the Church, and how you translate these beliefs into a lived faith which visibly transforms lives.

The world, and the Church, have changed a lot since the days of John and Charles Douglas; but the Society they founded a hundred and fourteen years ago is alive and well – and looking to the future.

Please remember us in your prayers. You might also let us know if there are ways in which we might assist you in your work.

Thank you very much.

Principals of the Society of the Faith

John Douglas	1905
William Wand	1955
Graham Leonard	1969
Anselm Hughes	1971
Cyril Eastaugh	1972
Peter Moore	1983
Oswald Clark	1987
Derek Pattinson	1992
Julian Litten	2002
Andrew Hoblely	2018