

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

I am very grateful to the Society of the Faith for organising this day, and in advance thank all our contributors. We are going to do a substantial amount of listening, but I hope that, as well as listen, we will all be here for a good discussion at the end.

Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher may not be remembered primarily as a great theologian, but we do owe him the creation of what one may call the 'modern Church of England'. It is fashionable nowadays to decry bishops as ecclesiastical managers, but if ever a church needed ecclesiastical management, it was the Church of England in the early post Second World War period. If the professionalisation of the clergy had only begun a century earlier! It was not until the 1950s that Anglican clergy had many – though not all – of the anomalies in their stipends ironed out, and pensions and retirement really made possible, and diocesan organisation developed to give substance to episcopal leadership. Fisher may have thought the revision of canon law was his greatest work, but it was his willingness to engage with the structures of the Church of England and reshape them, as well as create constitutions for largely autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion abroad, which I think has really proved to be his legacy.

That being said, we should not forget Fisher's respect for theological endeavour. Without that, we would not be here today. He was willing to use the sharpest theological brains in the Church of England at the time in the cause of Christian unity. He may not have been an original thinker; but his understanding of Anglican identity and doctrine was wisely shaped – at least in my view – by the Lambeth Quadrilateral. That was his reference point for any and every ecumenical discussion. What did Anglicans believe? What the Quadrilateral stated: The Holy Scriptures, as containing all things necessary to salvation. The Catholic Creeds, as the sufficient statement of Christian faith. The Dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. The historic episcopate, locally adapted. Of course, Fisher's boldest ecumenical venture was to invite the Free Church to take episcopacy into its system – a venture as yet unresolved. But before doing that, he invited an illustrious galaxy of Anglican-Catholic writers and thinkers to consider the conflict between Catholic and Protestant traditions, and to examine where fundamental points of doctrine were the greatest and whether a synthesis was possible.

I think one of the most encouraging things about the publication seventy years ago of the report *Catholicity* is its origin in a request from the Archbishop of Canterbury acting alone. It was a very unusual initiative for any Archbishop of Canterbury. Back in the 1980s, when I worked at Lambeth, the Archbishop of Canterbury did have theological advisers who met regularly at Lambeth Palace. In more recent years, I fear there is little evidence of this sort of initiative, either because archbishops have not been captivated by theology or because they have been so competent theologically themselves that they thought they did not need advice.

What was the response of Michael Ramsey, Austin Farrer, Lionel Thornton, Gregory Dix, T. S. Eliot, Robert Mortimer, all these other luminaries, all these names, some of whom were still reverberating around the Church of England in my youth? How did they meet this request? It was not to dash off a brief essay each, or even to collaborate in a longer one. This group of fourteen scholars, theologians and writers met four times – and on two occasions for three consecutive days. They took the Archbishop's request remarkably seriously. That puts the time we are giving to today's Symposium into some sort of perspective; but at least we

are taking the Catholicity of the Church seriously and believe it to be an issue worth considering in our own day.

Why do we believe it is still worth exploration? I just have one thing to say which strikes me about that before our first speaker. One of the largest congregations in the city of Norwich is called Soul Church. It meets in a warehouse. They see around 1,200 people on an average Sunday. Soul Church is in the Charismatic Evangelical tradition, though it has what may seem to some a surprising appeal to gay and transgendered people. It is now affiliated (though still independent) to the Hillsong movement. When a new pastor was appointed three years ago, and because I have had a relationship with Soul Church for some time, I was asked to go and welcome, anoint and commission him, and to preach one of three sermons in a three-and-a-half-hour service. They do know how to induct! But it struck me that what that they seemed to long for – and this is not unique in this tradition – is a representative figure of the wider church to anoint and lay hands on those commissioned for ministry. A bishop is recognised as someone who represents more than who he or she is. Their theology hardly creates space for the episcopate, given the way their pastors emerge; but they seem to have an instinct which I would call ‘a longing for Catholicity’ – though very inadequately expressed.

I see it, too, in our congregations which have been most influenced or supported by Holy Trinity Brompton. For them, it is not simply that the Church of England is the best boat to fish from – it is not always the best these days – but they believe the Church must be grounded in scripture, universal in its mission, with an authentic and apostolic ministry, accountable well beyond the local congregation. That, I think, is what I believe to be part of ‘a longing for Catholicity’.

Some look at the Church of England at the present time and see a great Protestantisation of our life. I am not sure they are looking closely enough. That is why I think what we are doing today is so important. Those of us who cherish the Catholicity, not just of the Church of England but of the whole church of God, have been remarkably quiet about it in recent decades, or have seen it as something distinctive to ourselves; yet it is a gift of God to the whole church. If it is not, it is nothing. Perhaps it is actually time for a new theological response to that archiepiscopal request made seventy years ago. I hope it might be. It is just possible. When you think that the Catholic movement in the Church of England was founded on the opposition to Irish disestablishment, stranger things have happened than a little group of people in Southwark Cathedral actually changing something in the wider Church. The time may have come.

We are first of all going to take a historical perspective in a more detailed way from Dr Andrew Chandler, whose book with David Hein on Archbishop Fisher, published in 2012, gave a more rounded view of what Geoffrey Fisher represented – perhaps more rounded than the major biography by Edward Carpenter in 2012. Many of you will know Andrew’s writings as a twentieth century church historian, not least his history of the Church Commissioners and the politics of reform in the post Second World War period, and of course his work on Bishop George Bell, the publication of which has coincided with Bell’s renewed prominence in the public sphere. It is more than twenty-five years since I first met Andrew and became one of the founding trustees of the George Bell Institute, which he guided for a long time. There is no better twentieth century church historian to set the scene for the report on Catholicity and the questions it raises. Andrew, we look forward to all you have to say to us. Dr Andrew Chandler.