Editorial: Why Richard Fishacre?

Maura O'Carroll SND

It is a paradox of the universality of Christ's Incarnation and Redemptive work that it can and should be expressed in particularity. Artists have always instinctively known that if the message of the reality of the Incarnation is to come home to us, it must be drawn and coloured in images and landscapes that are part of the imagination and reality of those who look at their pictures. A glance at the powerful iconographic tradition of the Church makes this clear. This is a theological image of Christ and his mission. We have every right to ask that the same be done in words about Christ and his mission. If we in England are to have a theology which, while part of the tradition of the Church is not in a thought-process recognisably German or French or North American or Australian or Indian or South American, we need to return to the roots (fashionable exercise) of our English theological tradition. One person stands like a giant at the start of this tradition - Robert Grosseteste, an early master of Theology, a polymath. He was associated with the schools in Oxford which became in the 1220's and 30's the University of Oxford, was the first regent master in Theology for the Franciscans in Oxford, and became Bishop of Lincoln in 1235. Of course there are two earlier unique figures: Bede of Jarrow, the Anglo-Saxon monk whose Scripture commentaries are still used; and Anselm of Val d'Aosta, monk of Bec where most of his work was done, and later archbishop of Canterbury. But undoubtedly Grosseteste is the first Englishman. And, following Robert Grosseteste, is the Dominican Richard Fishacre, untimely cut off by death according to Matthew Paris, in 1248. If there is a mark of Grosseteste's work, it is his emphasis on the supremacy of Scripture in the theological enterprise. If there is a mark of Fishacre' s work, and here I venture in ignorance, it is the necessity of living in the present with all its challenges and problems. Hence his pastoral as well as his academic concern. Despite the well-publicised criticism by Grosseteste of Fishacre's "modern" teaching in the Oxford theology faculty, there is far more agreement between Grosseteste and Fishacre than difference. Both had a genuine interest in the scientific tradition in Oxford, using it in their theological enquiry, and both were pastors. How much interaction there was has yet to be discovered. Also to be discovered is why Thomas Aquinas wanted his own copy of Fishacre's *Sentence Commentary*.

Some of these questions may be answered as the edition of Fishacre's *Sentence Commentary* progresses. With R. James Long of Fairfield University CT are five other editors, Stephen F. Brown of Boston College,

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Photo by Pat Lucey OP

This issue of *New Blackfriars* contains papers given at the Fishacre Colloquium held in honour of Leonard Boyle OP on July 8th 1998 at Blackfriars, Oxford

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Alexander Eichinger of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences in Munich, Joseph Goering of the University of Toronto, Maura O'Carroll SND London and Klaus Rodler of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. It is hoped that the first volumes of the edition, planned over a decade, will be published in Munich under the watchful eye of Klaus Rodler in 1999. In the meantime interested readers have to be content with this issue of *New Blackfriars*. The papers published here stem from the Colloquium held in July 1998 in Blackfriars Oxford to commemorate the 750th anniversary of the death of Richard Fishacre and to celebrate with sung Mass, conversation and a wine and cheese party the gift of this little- known English theologian to the Church.

Who is Richard Fishacre?

Maura O'Carroll SND

Information about Richard Fishacre[1] is limited. Making sense of it is like assembling a jigsaw puzzle with many of the pieces missing. It is known that he was a regent master in the *studium* at Blackfriars, Oxford in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, that he taught, that he preached, that he wrote several books and that he died in 1248. This, so far, is the only certain date in his life. Hence the memorial and celebration 750 years later in 1998.[2]

There are a few items of more or less contemporary information about Fishacre: the Paris MS[3] seems to indicate that the annotator knew Richard Fishacre who was still alive. Whether the annotator was Richard Fishacre is at present an unanswerable question. The St Albans' chronicler, Matthew Paris, expressed unusual appreciation and praise of both Richard Fishacre and Robert Bacon[4]. Nicholas Trivet, writing about fifty years or so after Fishacre's death, indicated that he came from the Exeter diocese.[5] Whether any of Fishacre's writings contain autobiographical information is still a question which may be answered in the next ten years.

Fishacre is an unusual name. In neither Ekwall's place name dictionary[6] nor the *Oxford Dictionary of Surnames*[7] is the name Fishacre found. It would seem that the "Fish" element is fishy—a metonymic occupational name for a catcher or seller of fish—rather than a variant of

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