

THE CONFRATERNITY OF SAINT PATRICK **Gerald Williams**

Mention of the Confraternity of Saint Patrick in a recent Newsletter brought back many happy memories for me, and, I'm sure, for the ageing and dwindling band of former members. The Confraternity was founded in 1953 by a group of confirmed members of the Church of Ireland, who were banded together to maintain and encourage the non-Roman but authentic Catholic heritage that is to be rightfully and traditionally enjoyed in our historic and Apostolic Church of Ireland.

The Confraternity had a set of Beliefs, and Objects and Obligations, and a Rule of Faith. One of the Beliefs was that the Church of Ireland is the historic Catholic Church of this land with the Roman Catholic Church being referred to by some members as 'the Italian Mission' – not a description we would use nowadays even by those of us who still hold to the expressed Belief regarding the Church of Ireland.

A number of the members belonged to St. George's in Belfast, where even those members fortunate to belong to Parishes where worship was conducted with as much dignity and ceremonial as was consistent with the Rubrics of the Prayer Book would attend occasionally with great pleasure to participate in its slightly more advanced worship in those days or, braving the Free Presbyterian protesters, to hear a special Speaker or Missioner.

When I joined the Confraternity, the Honorary Secretary and mainstay was Albert Gilliland. Albert also ran the St George's Youth Club and it was in the Club Rooms at High Street that the meetings took place. Canon Hector Love, who was the Chaplain, had obtained the blessing of Archbishop Gregg for the formation of the Confraternity. This, as Canon Love was often wont to remind us, was given on the understanding that he, Canon Love, would be there to keep an eye on us and make sure that our enthusiasm would be kept within bounds. I remember at one of my early meetings hearing Canon Love asking Albert if I was 'one of us'. Perhaps Hector thought I might have been sent by some organisation such as the Protestant Truth Society or the Irish Church Union to infiltrate the Confraternity. The Canon was assured that I was indeed 'one of us' and all was well.

Among the members when I joined, were two who became priests, Mervyn Dickson who is now retired, and Desmond Andrews whose early death was such a loss to the Church. Leslie McCarrison, organist of St James's, who was 'Rathcol' – the music critic of the Belfast Telegraph, was also a member as was the esteemed Honorary Secretary of Affirming Catholicism (Ireland) and a young John Gribben, now Father John Gribben, a member of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield since 1979 and recently the Prior.

The Confraternity met monthly at the rooms at High Street. There was sometimes a speaker. If not, we had discussions as to how the aims of the Confraternity could be

advanced; this being at a time when a Cross or Lights on, in, behind or about the Altar were still banned; and, when even in some Churches candlelight at a Carol Service was frowned upon as 'a step too far'. Perhaps we should have been grateful that at that time almost every Parish Church used the services of the Book of Common Prayer when we see now, 50 years on from the founding of the Confraternity, that some Parish Churches have abandoned the use of liturgical services altogether and the wearing of robes of any sort whatever never mind the Vestments for which we longed.

For a while the Confraternity would once a month on a Saturday evening gather for Compline in one of the local Parish Churches which had a sympathetic Rector. Some of the Parish Churches in which we said Compline were Immanuel Ardoyne, St Finnian's Cregagh, St Columba's Knock and St Patrick's Ballymacarret. Each year on Easter Monday the Annual Outing of the Confraternity took place. This was greatly looked forward to, as it gave us the opportunity to visit many Churches and other places of interest, and we were able to arrange for a celebration of the Eucharist and join in Evensong in various Churches during such outings.

The Confraternity, as seems to be the lot of many Church organisations, faded away. Many of those who were and are sympathetic to the Beliefs and Objects and Obligations of the Confraternity have found in Affirming Catholicism (Ireland) a congenial home where the integrity of the Church of Ireland as a Catholic and Reformed Church is upheld and Catholic faith and order within the Church of Ireland is affirmed.