GORING REVISITED: GEORGE BELL, THE ARTIST HANS FEIBUSCH, AND ART IN CHURCH

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There is adventure about—both at home and abroad. More especially, events are taking place in respect to the place of visual art in the witness of the Church that a generation ago, or even less, would have been laughed out of court: for the counsel of this committee or that, whether at parish vestry or cathedral chapter, would have looked askance at what, today, seems to be accepted almost on the nod. Examples of what is occurring, and especially in cathedrals up and down the country, are easy to cite. One need think only of recent exhibitions at Salisbury; the use of video (Bill Viola's *The Messenger*) at Durham; the appointment of an artist in residence at Gloucester; *Sculpture for Winchester*, the 1998 exhibition arranged in part across the Inner Close of the cathedral; an exhibition in November 1999 of Sussex artists in the North Transept at Chichester, conducted with a view to raising funds for the continuing restoration of the cathedral; Anthony Green's *Resurrection, An Act of Faith* at Christ Church, Oxford; or the planned (at the moment of writing) millennial exhibition, *Stations, the New Sacred Art*, to be held in 2000 both at the cathedral in Bury St Edmunds and at twelve associated parishes.[1] Varied as these examples are, they all share a very distinct characteristic—the temporary nature of the arrangements, for which no formal permission or approval was legally required from any supererogatory body or bodies. Reasons for this development are complex, and the outcomes—which frequently create controversy—are often fiercely debated. What has received less attention, however, is the foundation of the present relationship between art and the Church, a relationship that can be seen to stretch back to a judgment made by George Bell, then Bishop of Chichester, in his own consistory court in 1954, concerning a design for a mural by Hans Feibusch in the parish church at Goring-by-Sea.

That Feibusch (1898–1998), initially single-handedly but later with the assistance of Phyllis Bray (1911–1991), completed in the period 1940–1965 a larger *œuvre* in Anglican churches than that of any other muralist, certainly in the present century and probably for much longer, makes him a formidable figure in the artistic record. But he also contributed to contemporary debate, writing forcefully about the role of the church artist in both a monograph, *Mural Painting* (London, 1946), and several journal articles; and, as artist, was the central human actor in the Goring Judgment. The judgment, in which Bell made a plea for the Church to adopt an attitude towards artists which would permit the revelation of *a personal understanding* of the Christian life, was of historic importance and still informs current practice. In what follows I propose, therefore, to rehearse the terms of the judgment, and to comment on its continuing validity.[2] I begin with a paradigm:

Date: Saturday, 15th May 1954

Place: The Chapter House, the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Chichester

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[1] Although I cite examples mainly from cathedrals, parishes are also joining in the trend. Abroad one would include the *Kunst-Station Sankt Peter* of Friedhelm Mennekes SJ at his church in Cologne, where he regularly hosts challenging (some would say outrageous) exhibitions in pursuit of a belief that the experience of transcendence is to be sought and communicated by all means proper to a Christian pastor; or, to take a secular context, *Beyond Belief Modern Art and the Religious Imagination* held at the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, from April to July 1998.

[2] An abbreviated version of the present article, 'The Goring Judgment: Is it still Valid?', appeared in *Theology* (vol CII, No 808, July–August 1999).

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Event: Sitting of the Consistory Court, Diocese of Chichester.

Presiding: The Rt Revd G.K.A. Bell, Lord Bishop of Chichester—'with the full agreement' of the Chancellor, the Worshipful Kenneth M. Macmorran, QC.

Purpose: To deliver judgment on a petition heard by the Chancellor at a court held on Tuesday, 30th March 1954, at St Peter's Church Hall, Brighton .

Petition: To decorate the west face of the chancel arch at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Goring-by-Sea, West Sussex, with a mural showing 'Christ in Majesty'.

Petition submitted to Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) 23rd April 1953: vote at the Parochial Church Council in support of the petition (seventeen for, five against); petitioners being the incumbent of the parish, the Revd Walter William Seymour March, and the churchwardens, Henry George Knight and Frederick Stanley Hodges, both resident in the said parish.

THE JUDGMENT

The sole event at the court on 15th May 1954 was Bell's delivery of his judgment.[3] Extending to approximately two thousand words, it falls into three distinct parts. As a preliminary, Bell outlined the background, which related to advice from the DAC to the chancellor on 8th May 1953 (reiterated, despite considerable discussion, correspondence, and submission of revised drawings, on 8th January 1954) that the committee was 'unable to recommend' the scheme proposed for the granting of a faculty at St Mary's; and to the adjournment by the chancellor, after hearing evidence, on 30th March 1954. It was this adjournment, the sole decision of the chancellor but with fair knowledge of the likely result, that permitted Bell to sit at the resumed hearing and to deliver judgment.[4]

[3] Bell began his judgment by emphasising the support of the chancellor: 'It is', he said, 'with the full agreement of the learned Chancellor that I preside today and give the decision of the court' (Bishop of Chichester's judgment, 15th May 1954). As indicated in a letter of 4th June 1954, it seems likely that the chancellor may have viewed that statement as a matter of courtesy only; writing to Mr Eggar, Macmorran commented, 'I was not consulted before [the judgment] was delivered, and did not know what it contained until I heard it. Indeed I had not seen it until I had the opportunity of perusing the copy you sent me [...]' (West Sussex Record Office EPI/40 (1947–1960) 742). This includes Bell's judgment as well as faculty papers for the Feibusch mural at Goring. I am also indebted to Mrs Walter March, the widow of the incumbent at Goring, for permission to consult and quote from the archive of papers collected by Walter March about the events surrounding the petition.

[4] As readers will know, it is decidedly unusual for a judge to adjourn from his (or her) court, and for judgment to be given by another party. Bell's authority for delivering judgment was enshrined in 'the power reserved in the Patent granted to our said Vicar General [of our Consistorial and Episcopal Court of Chichester] on 6th June 1922 by Winfrid [Burrows—Bell's immediate predecessor] Lord Bishop of Chichester for the said Winfrid and his successors to grant Faculties out of our said [...] Court': extract from the faculty for the mural at Goring dated 25th June 1954. Interest in the legal process of the judgment is recorded in the West Sussex Record Office archive (cited in note 3) in 1987, when an inquiry reached the present registrar from the Rt Hon Mr Justice Lloyd. The only other instance in recent decades of a bishop intervening in this way appears to centre on Mervyn Stockwood when Bishop of Southwark, who discovered that parishes could 'crave the bishop's judgment' rather than that of the chancellor of the diocese. It can be argued that reservation of this kind, as noted in a much later judgment (of 1982) by the chancellor concerned, E. Garth Moore, involves 'a breach of the constitutional principle of the separation of the functions of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary': see *Re St Mary's, Barnes* [1982] 1 All ER 456, [1982] 1 WLR 531, quoted by Timothy Briden and Robert Ombres in 'Law, Theology and History in the Judgments of Chancellor Garth Moore' 3 Ecc LJ 223–224. Nevertheless, although at the present day it is opined that it 'would be expedient that no further patent should be issued in this form [reserving judgment in a cause of faculty to the diocesan bishop, and that] a person invited to be chancellor should make sure that it is not included in his [sic] patent (G. H. Newsom and G. L. Newsom, *Faculty Jurisdiction of the Church of England* (2nd edn, 1993) 17), there will continue to be instances where, as George Bell saw so clearly, a pastoral concern needs to be allowed precedence.

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After these preliminaries, Bell turned to the first part of his judgment: the history of the establishment of DACs. Reminding the court that DACs became statutory bodies under the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1938 and that their existence derived from a commitment given by Archbishop Randall Davidson in 1913 that the Church of England wished to retain its responsibilities for safeguarding the many 'ancient churches and the treasures they contain', Bell noted that at the time of their establishment '[little] thought had been given to the encouragement of creative artists who adorn and beautify parish churches'. This omission, he explained, derived from the Church's inheritance, from the nineteenth century, of an attitude that had become 'excessively traditional': by relying on craftsmen who were 'traditional and safe', the Church had cut itself off from the creative artist and relied instead on the imitative 'catalogues of the church furnishers'.

With this historical background established, Bell then made a decisive move. Combining the prime reason for the existence of DACs ('the protection of ancient churches and treasures') with a valued tradition of craftsmanship (in which the Church took considerable pride), he offered an interpretation of the stance adopted by DACs when considering designs and claimed this stance to be 'from the craftsman's standpoint [which necessitated] possession of complete information and detailed designs'. By interpreting the stance of DACs in this way, Bell relieved them of responsibility for any *impasse* reached in relation to consideration of new works of art: for, Bell suggested, a body charged with safeguarding an inheritance to give 'carte blanche [...] to a plan, the final form of which [could not] be judged from preliminary drawings', would be to take 'an undesirable risk'. Somewhat similarly, through reference to his legal obligations, he relieved the chancellor—and by implication, any chancellor in a like situation. Sitting in court as a judge, Bell averred, a chancellor will 'naturally look at [an] application submitted [...] from a legal point of view' and, 'where æsthetic issues are involved, will pay much respect to the advice given by the Advisory Committee'—advice which, as we know in the Goring case, rested on the Chichester DAC having twice declined to approve the Feibusch designs.[5]

With this reference to the importance of advice from the DAC to the chancellor, Bell completed what might be described as the exonerative part of his judgment, and moved to the second, the commendatory, with this assertion:

> 'the adornment and beautifying of parish churches is not solely a legal matter. Questions of artistic taste arise, and the judgment of what is fitting becomes in a real sense a pastoral matter, since every work of art introduced into a parish church is intended either to edify the beholder or to assist his [or her] worship'.

To support this claim, Bell linked the patronage of artists to 'trust', and went on to define the particular aspect of trust he saw as essential—what he defined as a willingness 'to give artists that degree of liberty without which their creative faculties cannot be exercised'. Elaborating this liberty, Bell emphasised that the 'artist does not conceive and design an object and then carry it out strictly to plan [for] he cannot show, as a craftsman can, exact working drawings'. As evidence for this view of the artistic process, Bell turned to history. Arguing that *in art* 'the stages of conception and execution are not separable' and that the 'quality of spontaneity, freshness

[5] Writing to the Registrar and Legal Secretary to the bishop on 20th April 1954, the chancellor noted that his personal 'aversion to the Feibusch proposals was only important in that it had been supported by the DAC'. In the same letter he records that he and Bell discussed the case on three separate occasions, and that 'I have let him see that I am strongly against Feibusch, as he is in his favour'.

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and immediacy which belong to the total work' are predicated on the artist changing and improvising to the last brushstroke, he cited examples from the flowering of mural painting during the Renaissance. Raphael (at the Vatican), Titian (at Padua), Michaelangelo (in the Sistine Chapel), and Leonardo da Vinci (at Milan), were all, Bell affirmed, 'unwilling or unable' to conform to a design because the work changed continually in execution; and he noted that da Vinci waited two years to complete the heads of Our Lord and Judas until the 'inspiration [necessary to carry him] along in the last stages of the work in order to attain the excitement and heightened perception which should be inherent in the final work' was forthcoming—and that, in consequence, when, eventually, the work was completed, certain differences showed in comparison with the announced intention or earlier design.

To emphasise this argument, Bell then offered a telling modern example, from the field of sculpture: Henry Moore's *Madonna and Child* at Northampton, where 'the final work correspond[s] exactly' neither to the preliminary drawings nor to the *maquettes* and, further, generalised this aspect of the creative process to 'other realms, [those of] musicians, poets, novelists, dramatists and similar practitioners [for all of whom an artistic work] is a work of continuous creation [beginning] with a conception which does not cease to grow and change until the work is complete'. In consequence of this process, Bell concluded that

> 'the Church must be prepared to trust its chosen artists to begin their work and carry it through to the end as the fulfilment of a trust, the terms and circumstances of which they understand and respect'.

With this peroration, Bell concluded his account of the creative process, and moved to the third and last part of the judgment—the particularities of the case before him. Because of the nature of his account of the artistic process, this inevitably meant a focus on the artist—Feibusch. Stressing Feibusch's responsiveness to the trust placed upon him (see (1) below), and also the encouragement he had received from his patron (see (2) below), Bell reminded his listeners that, as a mural painter, Feibusch was a creative artist, not a craftsman. Such a role, Bell emphasised, did not mean that he was 'free to roam wherever or however he [would]'; but equally he could not be 'a slave, as a copyist is a slave [for he was entitled to achieve] spontaneity in his obedience to the vision by which he is inspired' (see (3) below). Then, turning to Feibusch's status as a muralist, Bell affirmed that knowledge of his skill was widespread, as existing works could be seen not only at Chichester Cathedral, but also in his own private chapel, and in several churches in the Diocese of Chichester and beyond—Southwark, Chelmsford, and Peterborough; and that testimonies in favour of the present proposal had been given by 'men of excellent judgment in the field of art' (see (4) below).

Finally, with an assurance that he had 'considered the matter from a pastoral point of view [and that he was] satisfied that the mural painting [would] be both an object of beauty, and an aid to worship' (see (5) below) Bell announced that the faculty would be granted. [6]

COMMENT

Before reviewing the specific issues (as numbered above), there is one overall observation to make. In contrast to systems of secular law, which generally ensure, as far

[6] Considerable national interest ensued: see *The Times*, 17th, 24th, 26th, 27th May 1954.

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as possible, that the principals are unknown to each other, the faculty system permits a familial resonance. In some instances, no doubt, this is advantageous to the cause of a just outcome, but this may not be so in all cases and some petitioners must ache to be heard in a diocese other than their own.

(1) *Feibusch's responsiveness to the trust placed upon him*

Bell's qualification of trust (that commissioned artists should carry through their work 'as the fulfilment of a trust, the terms and circumstances of which they understand and respect') demands much of patrons too. 'Trust' is a mutuality: it operates within certain agreed, and often tacit, parameters, and both parties have a contribution to make. In the case of a mural, one would expect a potential patron to have seen examples of work by likely artists, to have related the characteristics of style to the planned site, and (and this is a highly sensitive stage) to have formed a view of the purpose of the work with sufficient clarity in order to communicate the commission with *élan* and generosity. Likewise, on the part of the artist, one would expect a visit to be made to the site, meetings with the patron (and parishioners), and participation in worship—each such occasion enabling the artist not only to understand the formal parameters of the commission (and I include in that the spoken attitudes of the patron—clergy and lay) but also to sense informal and often unspoken issues that the parishioners are not able to articulate. At the same time, as Bell repeatedly emphasised, the trust established must permit room for change, for modification of intentions, for gradual (even sometimes sudden) growth and insight.

One of the features of the Goring judgment is that the artist's understanding and interpretation of the trust placed upon him by a commission is still available—and in two forms. It is best seen by viewing the murals he had already accomplished—not as gallery exhibits or as depictions in the historical record, but *in situ*, in the various churches where they were painted. The value of this lies, of course, not just in seeing how he treated particular subjects, but in understanding how he related a design—in form, in scale, in colour—to particular architectural spaces, each with distinct qualities of light, and varying angles and distances determining how the final work would be viewed. Feibusch's responsiveness to these aspects of trust was sensitive as well as authoritative, and is an enduring element in his legacy to all who worship in churches he helped to enrich.

But Feibusch was an effective communicator in words as well as in paint, and his various writings offer what can be read not merely as a guide to good practice generally, but as a personal manifesto, an understanding of trust.[7] Asking (in *Theology*, Vol 57, January 1954) whether, in an age that sought 'salvation in the manufacture and accumulation of consumer goods [it was] possible to create religious art', he emphasised the responsibility placed on painters—for they 'must [...] learn many things', central to which was how 'to strike a balance between the traditional and [the] personal conception of a given subject'. On the one hand, pastiches of old art must, he declared, be avoided ('however much [...] patrons might desire [a traditional treatment,] no good art was ever made by imitation, and the *Church or the artists that lack the courage to be of their own time cannot give much to their contemporaries*'—present writer's italics); on the other hand, an artist 'must realise that, however deep his religious feelings, he cannot unreservedly inflict them on other people in a place of worship'.

[7] A full list of Feibusch's publications, together with a catalogue of his church murals, is given in Paul Foster (ed), *Feibusch Murals—Chichester and Beyond* (Chichester, 1997).

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Utterance, poised and balanced as this is, was in marked contrast to some of the opinions expressed at the time; but it appealed to the incumbent at Goring and it is to his contribution that we now turn.

(2) *Encouragement from the patron*

The idea for a mural at Goring originated with the incumbent, Walter March, and, independently, with several parishioners. In July 1951 the *Chichester Diocesan Leaflet* had carried an announcement from George Bell that grants were to be made available to any church in the diocese that wished to erect a painting on a religious subject. Commending the scheme, which was to be administered by the Sussex Churches Art Council (established in 1942 with Bell as President), Bell wrote: 'The re-entry of the painter into the Church as a creative artist, bringing his gifts with Christian themes, would, I believe, be a great service to religion.' March had responded rapidly to this possibility of enhancing his church. Since appointment in 1948—after experience as Resident Chaplain and Private Secretary to Bishop Bell 1939–40; Chaplain to the Forces, 1940–45; and a period on the staff at King's College, London—he had made, with support from the DAC, several improvements at Goring, and this seemed another opportunity. He had some insight into what was appropriate (his wife was a painter) and he knew that painting could form an instructive medium of evangelism. Further, he knew of Feibusch's work and its rich, spiritual intensity, and was impressed with Feibusch's 1951 mural at the Festival of Britain Church of St John, Waterloo, London; and proved himself to be a priest unwilling to be distracted from what he saw as a worthy purpose.

A complex period of negotiation followed, but throughout the two years of negotiation (first with the Sussex Churches Art Council, who recommended an artist March found wholly unsuitable; then with the DAC and on to the Consistory Court of 1954, which met in March, Bell's judgment being delivered in May the same year), he gave Feibusch unwavering support. Indeed, his commitment to the project, and to mural painting in general, was such that in the autumn of 1954, scarcely a month after completion of the mural and before its dedication on Michaelmas Day, he delivered to the 'Theology and Ministry Convention' (organised by Professor Cross at Christ Church, Oxford) a paper that advocated mural painting as an instructive medium of evangelism. Quoting Feibusch's own words (from an article in *Studio*, April 1954) about the responsibility placed upon an artist who accepts a commission from the Church, March warmly welcomed the medium of mural painting and speculated that if Feibusch's response to the trust placed upon him by the Church was better known, it would 'do much to dispel [...] suspicions which may lurk in the cloisters and closes of the Church'.[8]

The nature of March's suspicions are not specified, but he may have had in mind both mural painting as an art-form (so very different from a framed painting or even a sculpture—both of which, in face of public comment, can be moved around or quietly stored in a dusty corner) as well as his chosen artist. What we do know, however, is that the difficulties he and Feibusch had shared helped to build a bond of respect for each other such that they maintained contact for many years.[9]

[8] Quotations from the March Papers.

[9] More than ten years later when, in 1965, Feibusch received baptism into the Church of England, Walter March was the first to sign the register as godparent. Later the same year, in June, Feibusch was confirmed in St Paul's Cathedral.

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(3) *The vision by which the artist was inspired*

An artist's 'Vision' in relation to any work, informed as it is by the personality of the patron, by an architectural location, and by the multifarious experiences that contribute to our every act, can be best gauged in the outcome—and in this instance we can view Feibusch's mural, still *in situ* in St Mary's Church at Goring-by-Sea. What we know in addition, however, are the terms of the commission (as first articulated), the labour and joys of progression, the detail of modification to the design (at the twelfth hour), and—and this is a remarkable tribute to Feibusch's stature as a person—his own manifesto.

March's invitation to Feibusch, dated 20th April 1953, had specified a location (chancel arch, facing the congregation), commented on the church being 'unusually light, as we have only a very small amount of coloured glass', and suggested as subject 'something in the nature of a symbolic group of angelic beings, indicating worship'. From this first glimmer of an idea Feibusch formed the mural, *Christ in Majesty*; but the journey towards that finished article was, even in artistic terms, extensive. Commenting on this journey at the Oxford Conference, March had reminded his audience that it was impractical for a muralist to present to either patron or the DAC an 'exact scaled-down drawing of the suggested object [mural]—which is what DACs customarily required in order to reach a judgment of appropriateness. A muralist, March pointed out, 'works in successive stages from small designs, to individual studies, to large-scale cartoons [and] finally to the wall itself: and hence, all the artist's work 'is exploratory *up till the last stroke of the brush and the moment of removal of the scaffolding* [present writer's italics]. It is', March affirmed, 'this characteristic [of mural painting] which ensures the spontaneity, freshness, brilliance and power of the object'.[10]

With an apologist of this vigour and insight, it is surprising that the negotiations had been so protracted; but March's knowledge had been enriched by circumstances that had led him to follow the tortuous journey that Feibusch was to follow in articulating his progressive vision. Throughout the discussion of designs and sketches the DAC had insistently expressed concern at the depiction of the central figure. This depiction was minuted (8th May 1953) as 'very unsatisfactory [since it] could not be said to depict Christ in Glory, enthroned and vested as a King'. As it happened, this was true—Feibusch's vision of the Christ figure, as expressed in sketches, had omitted any conventional, symbolic indication of kingship. But then a remarkable event occurred: at the very last moment, prompted by a member of the congregation and only a few hours before the removal of the scaffolding, he had added—to his great satisfaction—a halo.[11]

A more reassuring illustration of the long journey of artistic creation, of how insight is often emergent from a period of intense, committed labour, might be difficult to find. Years previously, in his treatise on mural painting—which served as a manifesto throughout his life as a muralist—Feibusch had declared, addressing artists:

> 'Bear in mind your responsibility towards the people who take your work in good faith and, although it is your vision which makes your paintings valuable, do not

[10] Quotations from March's address to the 'Theology and Ministry Convention' cited in the text above.

[11] Data provided in a personal letter, 1st September 1996, to the present writer from Mary Joice (née Balmer), private secretary at the time to George Bell, citing a letter from Feibusch of 30th July 1954 in which he wrote, 'Your conversation and opinions impressed themselves on my mind [...] and the following morning [...] I painted the white outline around the head of Christ; much, I think, to the advantage of the whole picture'.

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> let your personal idiosyncrasies and temperament give them a distorted perspective. Once you have convinced yourself that you are quite clear about your work carry it out as vigorously as you can and without further compromise'.[12]

That, despite this injunction, Feibusch was to modify his mural at Goring 'in the last hour'—to incorporate a halo on the head of Christ—is proof not just of his integrity as an artist, but a compelling witness also to his humility as a man.

(4) *Feibusch's status as a muralist, and the judgment of those in 'the field of art'*

At the time of the Goring commission, Feibusch was at a relatively early stage in his career as a church muralist—although he had accomplished several religious works elsewhere, as well as in the diocese—but had already established himself as a considerable figure in ecclesiastical art. This led in the instance of Goring, to wide-ranging support for his ability and skill.

His first religious mural (at a new Methodist Hall at Colliers Wood, London) had been completed in 1937; and it was this work to which Bell was referred when, shortly after, he had sought advice from London circles about artists willing to work in Anglican churches. In consequence of the recommendation the bishop and the artist first met on New Year's Day 1940, and visited St Wilfrid's, Brighton, the same day. It was from this meeting that had sprung the commission for a sequence of murals depicting the *Nativity*, 1941.

From this beginning, Feibusch had extended his work in the diocese to Eastbourne (a complex, narrative *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1944, at St Elisabeth's), and to Chichester, where he painted in the cathedral (*Baptism of Christ*, 1951) and in Bell's private chapel at The Palace (*Ascension*, 1953). But there were achievements also in the metropolitan world, notably for Thomas Ford (of Thomas Ford and Partners) at the Festival of Britain Church of St John, Waterloo (1951), and at several churches in the Southwark diocese. These commissions, together with his publications and numerous exhibitions, had ensured that by the time of the DAC discussions his work as a church artist had become well established in the public domain. And it is, then, unsurprising that at the time of the Consistory Court in March 1954, the principal petitioner, Walter March, was able to adduce in Feibusch's favour voices of notable authority; and letters of support were read from Sir Kenneth Clark and Sir Hugh Casson, and Clifford Musgrave (director of Brighton Art Gallery) and Philip James (Director of Art, Arts Council) attended in person.

With commendations so broadly based—from the incumbent, from the parochial church council, and from local and national figures 'expert in the field of art'—it is puzzling to find that the DAC declined to recommend that the chancellor should grant a faculty for the Feibusch designs.[13] An issue (or issues) of substantive concern, over and above the phrasing of the minute from the DAC, must, one would think, have been at work—and comment on this will be offered below. At this point, it is perhaps pertinent to note that the Goring mural was Feibusch's last commission in

[12] H. Feibusch, *Mural Painting* (1946), p 91.

[13] Moreover, the chairman of the DAC, Canon C. B. Mortlock, was a strong advocate in Feibusch's favour. It was he who informed the bishop that 'one of the drawings for the Goring painting was hung *on the line* at the present Royal Academy Exhibition!'—quoted by George Bell in a letter to the chancellor as early as 18th May 1953 (underlining and exclamation mark added by Bell at the time of signing the letter). The phrase 'on the line' is less current than formerly; but it used to be 'said of pictures hung so that the centre is about on a level with the eye' (*OED*), and *Punch* had carried an item as long ago as 26th April 1873 noting that such pictures were hung 'for reason of their merit'.

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the diocese. Although he continued an extensive programme of murals in Anglican churches elsewhere (working in some eighteen other churches), no further work was executed in the Chichester diocese.

(5) *The mural as an object of beauty and aid to worship*

I have nothing to say, at present, on the first of these assertions, but the claim that the mural would be an 'aid to worship' raises pertinent issues about theological 'correctness' and also about the environment of worship.

The reasons leading to Bell's decision to sit in his own court are wide-ranging and complex, but the archival record shows that a leading issue in debate at the DAC—and also one that weighed strongly with the chancellor—was the appropriateness of the representation of the Christ figure. As indicated earlier, at the 8th May 1954 meeting the DAC had rejected the design because it 'could not be said to depict Christ in Glory, enthroned and vested as a King'. This notion, of representation, was picked up by the chancellor, and in a letter of 26th May to the diocesan registrar (the detail of which was copied to Walter March on 8th June) Macmorran commented not only that Christ 'should be shown with some of the emblems of Kingly and divine dignity', but also that he thought it 'very curious that Our Lord should be shown with His left arm raised while He [was] in the act of blessing with His right hand'.

These views were passed to the artist, and Feibusch responded by writing to the chancellor direct. In the course of a closely-argued letter (24th Iune 1953) he affirmed that

> 'freedom of interpretation, as long as it is coupled with real seriousness and with ability, is the prerogative of the artist and the sine qua non of any vital art. Without it religious art quickly sinks to the level of the dreadful imitation Gothic—gilt, brightly-coloured, tricked out with every dead ornament, and completely empty of spirit, with which our churches are encumbered.'[14]

Opinion as forceful as this (for what Feibusch was commenting on was, by implication, the subjects of decision made by chancellors in dioceses across the country—including what for Macmorran was almost a lifetime's work) can scarcely have endeared him to the chancellor, but in all the documentation and in correspondence with third parties, the due process of legal procedure was strictly followed and there is no trace of personal animosity. This is notable testimony to the impartiality of those concerned. At this distance of time it would be tempting to note that Feibusch was a German, a refugee, and also a Jew (although he had been granted British citizenship in 1940 and much later, in 1965, was to be baptised and confirmed as an Anglican), and that several members of the DAC had seen service in the war, in one case in the First World War as well—and to presume that it was matters of race and birth that underpinned the decisions. But careful scrutiny of the papers in the case reveals nothing of the kind: and attention properly falls on matters of far greater substance—representation (including an understanding of the purpose of representation) and on knowledge of the intentions of visual communication.

Religious iconography is a relatively stable discipline—the keys to Heaven are still associated with St Peter, the wheel with St Catherine, the grid-iron with St Laurence, and so on; but the purpose of these emblems or of any typical pose, gesture or other

[14] West Sussex Record Office archive: see above.

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device has, I think, changed. Over recent decades, and for the artistic community ever since those great exhibitions organised at the Grafton Galleries by Roger Fry in 1910 (*Manet and the Post-Impressionists*) and then again in 1912 (*Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*), art has affirmed that we live in a period of what might be called second- (or even third-) phase Romanticism in which the opinion and force of the individual, whether as a separate 'one' or as groups of like-minded 'ones', arrogate to themselves, singly or severally, as much authority as that held formerly by established, scholarly communities with a century or more of tradition behind them. This movement has effected considerable change not only in what is now classed as religious art, but also in how art is viewed.[15]

It would not be appropriate in the present article to make a case for understanding how, say, canvases that would often be classified as 'abstract' may communicate powerful messages about the Christian life (members of DACs and chancellors will have their own systems in place for sensitising themselves to developments in the wider world that contribute to the many decisions they make). It is pertinent, however, to say something about the immediate issue under discussion—Feibusch's depiction of the Christ figure in what Chancellor Macmorran described (see above) as a rather 'curious' pose and without any 'emblems of Kingly and divine dignity'. The import of this comment may be various, but a leading element in any decision will have been a desire for appropriateness, for a depiction that acknowledged Christ as King. And yet, even in the world of the 1950s, and certainly in the present world of 2000, *representation* is a poor criterion by which to judge artistic depiction. In a world of raging dissolution, of the fashioning of a new social order (and that was as evident in the post-war world in which Feibusch worked as it is now), no emblematic representation alone can be of any assistance—for such things are the mere rags of history. What then, and now, makes painting valuable is *recognition* or, as Feibusch averred (see (3) above), the artist's *personal vision*: it is that, not obeisance to inert, dead symbols and emblems, that moves the worshipper to Christian humility and adoration.

Put as bluntly as that may court cries of horror and dismissal ('arrant subjectivity', I hear you sigh—and you would have Macmorran with you, for in a letter to the diocesan registrar of 20th April 1954 he noted, 'I did not see how I could in conscience grant a faculty which would let Feibusch loose in Goring church'); but such a reaction is to misunderstand the purpose not just of representation (in the way indicated), but of visual communication as well. It is not the form of Christ we worship, but the person—and the purpose of any figurative representation must be to promote recognition, submission, to a living power in our midst. 'Christ', as Gerard Manley Hopkins so vividly put it, 'plays in ten thousand places [...] in eyes not his / To the Father through the features of men's faces'—and not one of those faces is invested with any emblem or symbol of representation other than that of the suffering individual.[16] It is, we might say, not the *generalities* of our lives that we place before God, but the specificities of our daily living, our unique and graspable individuality.

[15] I refer here in particular to the power of curators and others, who may often be driven by commercial concerns rather than by artistic, the Turner Prize being a good example of curators determining what, it is claimed, should be classified as art. More generally, one could cite the critic of *The Sunday Times*, Frank Rutter, who at the time of Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition noted that modern artists were 'smashing the fallacy that imitation [...] is art' (quoted in *Modern Art in Britain 1910–1914*, ed. Anna Greutzner Robins, Barbican Art Gallery Catalogue 1997).
[16] From the untitled sonnet beginning 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame', Poem 115 in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed Norman H. Mackenzie (Oxford, 1990).

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To have the courage to do that, to gain support from every aid possible in face of the challenge of Christ, is part of our Christian duty; since for many the images of art provide support, illumination, and the power—often at the most unexpected moments—to influence, and even on occasion to effect, conversion to the Christian path. To meet a challenge of this order, however, requires an acknowledgement of the changed world in which we live. To use a contemporary phrase, we are part of 'a learning society', part of a world in which individuals are 'empowered', and the Church's understanding of its role in such a society is, I think, still being worked out. Although the truths of belief are absolute, their artistic expression continuously changes. As George Bell said in a talk on the BBC Home Service some months after his judgment: 'Modern religious art has too often been divorced from art generally [...] artists must reaccustom the faithful to beauty'.[17] How that 'beauty' is articulated will vary considerably from parish to parish, from diocese to diocese, and from one opportunity to another opportunity; but it is only by facing the challenge of the present and, at the same time, by holding fast to the truths of faith that we can meet the ever-increasing threat to our resilience and resource.

Hence, although the principles of the Goring judgment are still valid, the ways which they need to be implemented may be more extensive than George Bell envisaged. It is in this sense that I referred in my opening paragraph to the 'temporary nature' of so many of the current opportunities offered to congregations to experience contemporary art. And yet, and yet . . . to offer a worshipping community a temporary exhibition may be a two-edged sword: although, on the one hand, it provides an opportunity to open the church to the world (and for parishes to avoid the demands of faculty jurisdiction), it may also align the exhibiting authority, whether cathedral or parish, with the procedures and purposes of secular galleries and museums. There are strong voices that favour such a move, one of the most recent being the first leader in *The Times* (13th November 1999) which, under the title 'England's Glories', advocates a return to seeing the naves of our places of worship as " 'people's palaces" [...] where people meet for any useful and enjoyable activity'.

What is 'useful' and 'enjoyable' is, however, at least in terms of art, rather far removed from what George Bell referred to as 'a pastoral matter [...] intended [as an object of beauty] either to edify the beholder or to assist [...] worship' (quoted above). But it is precisely those terms, despite the changed society of today, that continue to carry authority. Unless ecclesiastical law, in respect of faculty jurisdiction, acknowledges that church buildings belong to every generation (rather than, as a correspondent remarked in *Church Times* (6th November 1998) 'not [...] to any one generation'), and that every generation is entitled, with fitting advice and guidance, to adorn and beautify its venues of worship in accordance with the prayerful decisions of everyone involved, the gap between 'practice' and 'permission' will grow ever wider, to the increasing frustration of all who work, on the one hand to re-invigorate custom and tradition, and on the other hand to moderate the excesses of so many metropolitan ventures.

To promote temporary exhibitions of new artistic works in cathedrals, at diocesan centres, is one thing, but the mission of the Church exists at parish level also and it is to churches up and down the land that we need to turn if, as worshippers, we are to experience George Bell's plea that art has the capability of 'an object of beauty [...] to assist worship'. To visit the latest exhibition at one's diocesan centre, the cathedral, is to experience only half of Bell's plea—the edification: the other half, the contribution to worship, requires a much greater focus on familiarity, on the presence of art in one's place of worship. The power of art is such that repeated experience of the best yields the greatest reward. For that to be available to all, provision needs to be made in parishes, as George Bell saw.

[17] Published in *The Listener*, 13th January 1955, pp 65–66.

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