

Eugene Rathbone Fairweather
November 2, 1920 – April 6, 2002

Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Canon in the Anglican the Diocese of Toronto, Eugene Fairweather, known as “ERF” to students and Father Fairweather to parishioners, was elected a member of the American Theological Society in 1957 and served as its first Canadian president in 1973.

The son of a railroad president from the Maritimes, Eugene graduated with a B.A. from McGill University in 1941 and earned an M.A. from the University of Toronto in 1943. In 1944 he was appointed Tutor in Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto, and, except for two years in exile at Union Theological Seminary in New York, from which he obtained his Th.D. in 1949, his entire academic career was spent at Trinity. He was appointed to the Keble Chair in Divinity there in 1964.

Although, improbably, his doctoral dissertation on Thomas Aquinas was directed by Paul Tillich, Eugene’s unofficial mentor at Union was Reinhold Niebuhr’s wife, Ursula. They were among those who convinced Tillich to add the notion of Catholic substance to his championship of the Protestant Principle as key to any account of Christianity. Eugene’s own lifelong commitment was to what he taught students to call “the Second Reformation,” the Anglo-Catholic revival in the Church of England begun in the nineteenth century.

Fairweather’s best known publications were two anthologies: *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* for the Library of Christian Classics, published in 1956, and *The Oxford Movement* (1964). He was president of the Canadian Theological Society in 1957-8 and a founding editor of *The Canadian Journal of Theology* from 1960 to 1970. With R. F. Hettlinger of Wycliffe College, he wrote *Episcopacy and Reunion* (1952), arguing that episcopacy is of the *esse* of the church, against Hettlinger’s espousal of the *bene esse* position. Fairweather’s monograph, *The Meaning and Message of Lent* was chosen as the ECUSA Presiding Bishop’s Lenten book in 1962.

A high point of Eugene’s life was his stint as an Anglican observer at the Second Vatican Council. His spoken Latin was good enough that he needed no translator. For many years he served on the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and its Canadian sub-group. He was also a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. As an Anglican who looked more to Rome than to Geneva, he blocked a proposed merger of the Anglican and United Churches of Canada in 1968. But he affirmed his two women teaching assistants’ calling to the priesthood by speaking at the 1976 General Synod in favour of the resolution to ordain women. It passed despite the unrelenting opposition of most Anglo-Catholics.

With his pen, Canon Fairweather wielded great influence nationally through a monthly column written for *The Canadian Churchman*. He swung opinion behind liturgical renewal and was a joint author of “the spinach book,” aka *The Book of Alternative Services* (named for the colour of its cover and unofficial motto, “try it, it’s good for you!”). Throughout his Toronto years, he was an honorary assistant at St Mary Magdalene’s (dubbed “smokey Mary” for its incense), where he inaugurated a folk mass known as “Fairweather’s Frolics,” notable for the large number of children he involved in the service. From his study of Saint Augustine he had become convinced that baptized children should receive the Eucharist, without waiting for Episcopal confirmation. He always considered his academic work an integral part of his priestly vocation. Because of that, he had the ear of more bishops than most theologians and ensured that

diocesan candidates' committees set high theological standards for all postulants in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Professor Fairweather was a founding member of the ecumenical faculty of the Toronto School of Theology. His courses on Aquinas were among the few given in the Theology Department by the Protestant colleges at the basic degree level that were approved for credit by the Catholic colleges. His procrastination over sending in grades prompted the department to authorize "the Fairweather grade," i.e. the average of the grades earned in all other courses by a student waiting to graduate, recorded by the student's dean. When I was still at Wycliffe, Eugene once phoned to say that he had given a certain student C-, only to be told that a grade of B had already been entered on the official transcript.

When Eugene retired, it took three people to replace him, two of them being Joanne McWilliam and myself. A shy man, he was always a courteous colleague and is still revered as a teacher by several generations of our students.

Peter Slater, ATS April, 2006