



Catharine Heron

Catharine Heron, née Leach, was born in Bristol, where her father was a teacher at Clifton College, the boys public school. She went to Clifton High School, which is where she met BRF founder Leslie Mannering, when he prepared Catharine and her classmates for their confirmation in 1945. She kept her folder of the notes Leslie Mannering produced for his confirmation candidates until 2020, when she kindly donated them to the BRF archives. Catharine has written and illustrated a book of Bible reflections called *Discovering God* (Shepherd-Walwyn, 2015). A widow, with two adult children, she celebrates her 92nd birthday in 2022.

During the war Clifton College was evacuated to Bude on the north coast of Cornwall, so Catharine spent ‘a very happy war down there by the sea’, where she went to the local state school. But then exams loomed. In 1944, when she was fourteen and due to start her school certificate, she was sent back to Clifton High School, where she went for two terms – the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945 – as a boarder. She recalls her confirmation classes:

‘When I was back at school as a boarder we were offered confirmation classes and I joined in. The classes were taken by Canon Leslie Mannering who was then a residentiary canon at Bristol Cathedral. I was confirmed in Bristol Cathedral on 7 March 1945, by the Rt Revd Clifford Salisbury Woodward MC, the then Bishop of Bristol. In those days the custom was that girls wore white dresses and veils for their confirmation but Bristol High girls traditionally wore green silk dresses with white veils. But in my year there weren’t enough green dresses for everyone and because I was the odd one out, having only been a boarder for two terms,

I was told I had to wear a white dress after all. I was SO pleased! I didn’t want to wear a green dress for my confirmation!



‘Confirmation for me was a serious commitment. It wasn’t a casual thing that I just fell into. I chose to go to confirmation classes. I’ve always been a practising Christian and confirmation was one

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When Catharine left school she went to the art college in Bristol for a three-year teaching course. She then spent ‘two somewhat unhappy years teaching in Maidenhead’ while her fiancé was trying to qualify as a lawyer.

‘I married a Christian,’ she says, ‘but unfortunately our children were put off by the old-fashioned services in the little parish church where we lived in the late 1950s/early 1960s. There were no children’s services in those days and they had to sit through Matins. My husband was a church warden for some of the time we were there and the rest of the time he was on the PCC so we attended church as a family every Sunday. For a child at that time the services were boring. You sat still in a pew and you did not talk.’

In those days Catharine and her husband’s faith was what she calls a traditional Anglican faith, but this changed when what became known as the charismatic movement arrived in the 1980s. ‘Our faith became more energised,’ she says.

‘My husband and I used to read the Bible together each day. Originally we read BRF notes but then we started to enjoy the books – collections that had a whole year of readings and reflections – and I still use those. I feel slightly like a traitor to Canon Mannering by not continuing with the daily notes!’

When Catharine’s husband died six and a half years ago, not surprisingly she found herself in a very bad place: ‘I was very low and depressed and started having terrible panic attacks. In the middle of one my attacks I was completely overwhelmed by the fear that this was how my life was going to be from then on and I just cried out “Help!”’

‘The panic attack quietly subsided and from then onwards my relationship with God has gone from rather formal belief and trust to a far more intimate relationship. What I was hearing, spiritually, and thinking, was such a contradiction of my upbringing. You went to

church and said your prayers but there was no relationship with God, let alone a vibrant, living one. That was unheard of. So I needed the reassurance which God has given me. It would be interesting to know what Leslie Mannering would think about that. I have a feeling he would understand because I think he was a man with an open mind.’

Catharine has clear memories of Leslie Mannering:

‘I remember him as a lovely man: a gentle person. Very tall, very slim, very caring. I kept his confirmation class talks. He gave us a talk and then he always had them typed up and duplicated for us and he gave us a brown cardboard folder to keep them in so we had a record of all the classes to refer back to later.’

But even her fond memories would give no hint of how widely Leslie Mannering’s work would become known:

‘Leslie Mannering was a parish priest in Brixton and he started writing Bible study notes for his parishioners and it snowballed until it became what it is today. I don’t how the snowballing came about but its origin was a very simple parish project. It’s amazing what God can do. Absolutely amazing.’

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‘We’re so secular these days and the traditional church just doesn’t seem to be satisfying many people’s deep spiritual needs in today’s world. I think BRF has a big and very important contribution to make in today’s world.’



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