

# TRACTARIANISM THEN AND NOW

## THE CHURCH - CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC

A Lecture delivered at S. Mary's, Bourne Street on  
Thursday, 18 February 2010 as part of a Lent Course

By

Father William Davage

*Priest Librarian and Custodian of the Library, Pusey House, Oxford*

"No great cause is ever lost or won - the battle must always be renewed and the creed restated, and the old formulas, once so potent a revelation become only dim antiquarian echoes. But some things are universal, catholic, undying - the souls of which such formulas are the broken gleams. These do not age or pass out of fashion, for they symbolize eternal things. They are the guardians of the freedom of the human spirit, the proof of what our mortal frailty can achieve."<sup>1</sup>

PUSEY House comes to Bourne Street. It is always a pleasure to travel from Oxford, the home of the Oxford Movement, to Bourne Street, to S. Mary's, such a distinguished example of the full flowering of that Movement. From Oxford, "Beautiful city! So venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene! ... whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages ... Home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties"<sup>2</sup> to this glimpse of heaven in the streets of Pimlico. What is it, however, which brings us together? In this Lent course my colleagues at the House and I have been asked to locate us in the History of the Oxford Movement, its origins and development, its mind and its spirit, and based on that history to say something about the state of the Oxford Movement today and where we stand. John Henry Newman challenged the clergy of his day "O Presbyter, where do you stand?" and it remains a fair challenge to Anglo-Catholics today, people and priests. Where do we stand? What do we believe?

In this first lecture I need to clear some of the ground. The series has been called Tractarianism Then and Now but we need to speak a little about terms. It is characteristic of historians that the first thing they do is to dispute the title they have been given, even if they have given it to themselves. We could see the Oxford Movement and Tractarianism as lasting from 1833, when John Keble preached the Assize Sermon in the University Church, to 1845, when John Henry Newman converted to Rome. But, for our purposes, it is probably more profitable to see the Oxford Movement and Tractarianism as the first phase of a wider and more prolonged movement, something like the Catholic Revival in the Church of England, or, as a

---

<sup>1</sup> John Buchan in his biography of the Duke of Montrose

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* [In *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* p 9 (a)]

shorthand, Anglo-Catholicism. But to use those terms implies that the movement is more homogeneous and unified than it was and is. Are we Catholic Anglicans or Anglican Catholics? Are we English Catholics? Prayer Book Catholics? Modern Catholics? Extraordinary Form Catholics? English Missal Catholics? Anglican Missal Catholics? Traditional Catholics? Affirming Catholics? Anglo-Papalists? Protestants in fancy dress seeking “salvation by haberdashery”? To list just some of the epithets, I have avoided Puseyites and Puseyettes, is to see that there are shades of opinion and nuances, not to say open warfare, within the, within the ... what? Within the tent, the tribe, the ghetto? Let us say within the Movement. Inevitably, hacking through this undergrowth to open, agreed ground is not a straightforward task. So, what I hope to do in this talk is to begin with the Tractarians and the Oxford Movement, narrowly defined, and then try to say something about where we are today.

The immediate spur to John Keble to preach on National Apostasy in front of His Majesty's Judges of Assize was the proposal of the Government to suppress several Irish sees and to apply their revenues to secular, mainly educational, purposes. Keble brought into the public domain the sense of unease that had been simmering for a few years, the anxiety that the Church of England was in danger: in danger from legislation from a Parliament that was no longer exclusively Anglican; in danger from the feared results of the Emancipation of Catholics, in danger from the secular power's regulation of a Church that was a Divine Society, in danger from the infection of secular power with a detrimental liberalism, and a similar fear of that liberalism taking hold of the Church from within. That liberalism was expressed, some years later, by John Henry Newman as “the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another ... It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as true ... all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste, not an objective fact ... it is the right of each individual to make it say what strokes his fancy.”<sup>3</sup>

Tractarianism championed the liberty and the independence of the Church against the encroachments of a secular polity. It asserted the divine nature of the Church as it was pitched against an erastian state. Given that parliament, following Catholic Emancipation and the Great Reform Act of 1832, could no longer be regarded as an expression of an Anglican hegemony, the Oxford Movement asked the radical question, what right did Jews and Roman Catholics (and later agnostics and atheists) have to legislate for the divine society that was the Church of England. This question was accompanied by a radical critique of the doctrine and practice of the Church. To its detractors, it sought to dismantle the protestant inheritance of the sixteenth century, and those detractors were not mistaken because the Oxford Movement sought to restore the Church to its place within a Catholic heritage and understanding, and to recover the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, unsullied by the accretions of historical events. Thus, the aim of the Oxford Movement was a radical one and marked an assault on the English protestant and anti-Catholic consciousness that had become endemic in the English psyche.

---

<sup>3</sup> Biglietto speech 1879

If we have to locate the heart of Tractarianism we would find it the assertion that the Church and the Church of England is Catholic and Apostolic. Uncontentious enough, you may think. After all, every time we say the Nicene Creed we recite our belief in the “one holy catholic and apostolic church” *Unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*. The founding Fathers of the Movement were motivated by their firmly held and tenaciously articulated belief that the Church of England was the local embodiment and the national expression of a wider concept of Catholic Christendom. Their aim was to convince all members of the Church of England that they were Catholic and reformed, not reformed and protestant. They sought to re-awaken through their Tracts and sermons, and to make the Church of England aware, that a latent Catholicism was enshrined in its liturgies and formularies but these had lain dormant, submerged by an accretion of protestantism and anti-Catholicism inherited from the political and dynastic disputes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their aim was nothing less than complete conversion.

Their appeal was doctrinal and historical. In his sermon commemorating the centenary of the Oxford Movement, Father Keble Talbot CR said that “the leaders of the Oxford Movement did not propose to give the Church [of England] a Catholic character. That they were sure it had always possessed, and the confidence of Mr Keble’s assertion that he who ‘devoted himself to the cause of the Apostolic Church in these realms would sooner or later be on the winning side, and the victory would be complete, universal, eternal,’ came from the conviction that it is the Catholic Church which presents itself to the English people in the creeds, the sacraments, the ministry, the worship of the Church of England.”<sup>4</sup> The Church was Catholic because she had been founded by Christ as his Body in the world with universal reach. The Church was apostolic because Christ had founded his Church on the Apostles, those who had followed him throughout his ministry and witnessed to his resurrection and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the upper room. The Church was apostolic because she held fast to the doctrines and traditions of the Apostles, and because through the unbroken succession of her chief pastors, she derived her orders and her mission from them. The apostolic character of the Church was, and is maintained by the Apostolic Succession. The four marks of the Church were that she was one, holy, catholic and apostolic and her mission extended to the whole of mankind and the Gospel was addressed to the total life of mankind. That Church had lived on through the centuries, growing and expanding as the authentic and divinely authorised representative of Christ on earth. The Church Catholic was the teacher and guardian of the Christian Faith. She was the channel of Divine Grace. “The Holy Church Catholic throughout the world [is] manifested in and acting through what is called in each country the Church visible; which visible Church really depends solely on ... the invisible – not on civil power, nor on princes or any child of man, not on endowments, not on its numbers, not on any thing that is seen, unless indeed heaven can depend on earth, eternity on time, angels on men, the dead on the living. The unseen world, through God’s secret power and mercy encroaches upon this; and thus, though the visible Churches of the Saints in this world seem rare, and scattered to and fro, like

---

<sup>4</sup> Keble Talbot CR, The Divine Society. *The Centenary Sermons of the Oxford Movement*

islands in the sea, they are in truth the tops of the everlasting hills, high and vast and deeply rooted, which a deluge covers.”<sup>5</sup>

The Apostles were the sole channel of the powers bestowed by Christ and no one could possess them who had not received them in a direct line from the Apostles by the laying-on of hands. Tractarians held that if any body of Christians lost the apostolic ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, the three-fold ministry, it would cease to belong to the true Church, for then its officers or ministers would not possess either authority or the commission to teach in the name of Christ, or the power to absolve from sin, or to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice: all essential to the life, continuity and authenticity of the Church.

How, then did the Church of England fit into this conspectus? The underlying principle which the Tractarians relied on was that unity denoted the oneness of the Body of Christ, but union denoted the cooperation of the members within that Body. By analogy, a family is a unity because the same common life is to be found in all its members. But its union may be broken through quarrels and disputes, but the blood relationship which unites its members is indestructible, however serious or deep the rifts. It was, and is, of course, self-evidently true that the Church, the Body of Christ, has undergone quarrels and disputes that have split her into several parts, deeply and for great lengths of time, notably the split between East and West and the split of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and there have been numerous other denominational and sectarian splits as time has passed: how they love each other these Christians. But Anglo-Catholics maintained that while it was true that “different parts of the Church [had]fallen out, and their union with one another [had] been interrupted ... the unity of the Church remain[ed].”<sup>6</sup>

One Anglo-Catholic tract, in which the Movement has been knee deep, in 1933 summarised this assertion and claim with a fine self-confidence: “It is the glory of the Church of England that she forms a true part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. She is not a sect of yesterday. At the Reformation no new Church was founded. The Catholic Church in England rejected the unhistorical and autocratic claim of the Pope to be supreme ruler of the whole Church, as the Orthodox Churches of the East had rejected it five centuries earlier. But she has retained as they retained, the one faith, one worship, and the one ministry.” And what of the protestant content of the Reformation? This is robustly elided – if you can have robust elision – “In her struggle with the Papacy [the Church of England] was ill-advised as to ally herself for a time with continental Protestantism and she suffered much from that ill-fated association ... But in the merciful providence of God ... she did not lose her Catholic character; she made no change in the three-fold order of her ministry; the priesthood was preserved, the validity of the sacraments was secured, the fount of living truth was handed on.”

This may lack the intellectual, febrile subtlety of a Newman, the prodigious learning of Pusey, or the sophisticated insights of the theologian or historian, but I have used it to illustrate the Anglo-Catholic claim and position because it comes from a cheap teaching pamphlet in a series issued for the centenary celebrations of the Oxford Movement that had wide and popular distribution and it represents how the intellectual

---

<sup>5</sup> John Henry Newman, *Parochial Sermons* pp 198 – 201

<sup>6</sup> G. D. Rosenthal, *What is the Church?* London, CLA, [1933] The Church Tracts No 1 – no pagination.

arguments of the Tractarians (where there is sometimes the sense of senior common room talking to senior common room) had filtered down into the parishes. Tractarianism was "an intellectual movement ... it posed questions and offered answers on the rule of faith, ecclesiology, sacraments."<sup>7</sup> And that extract sets before us in straightforward terms the central and unresolved, still contested and contentious, problem that underscores theological and doctrinal debates in the Anglican Communion, the Church of England and the General Synod: is the Church of England rightly and properly to be regarded as cohering with the continuous history of the Church, secured in its catholicity by its retention of, adherence to, perpetuation of the apostolic succession, the historic catholic creeds, the historic threefold ministry, the sacraments, or is it more properly viewed as one of the protestant sects which emerged from the protestant Reformation? Is the Church of England protestant or catholic?

Standing here it is not difficult to know the answer but were we standing in Holy Trinity, Brompton (not a building I have been into) would we be able to give the same answer? We would have to say, without the visual aids, we would have to reiterate the Tractarian and Anglo-Catholic claim that the Catholic foundations of the Church of England have never been destroyed, though, we would have to admit, that her self-knowledge and self-definition have for long periods been at best dim and uncertain. The Tractarians and their successors argued that the Church of England was obviously out of communion with the main part of the Western Church, but she was not cut off from the undivided Church of the past and, it was argued, that the protestant influences which had played no part in the original Reformation, from which the Church had emerged Catholic and reformed, clouded and distorted the genuine Catholic nature of the Church so as to make it possible to make lazy assumptions that she was a protestant sect. And both Roman Catholics and Nonconformists had formed an unholy alliance in the attempt to keep alive this fiction. This remains a minefield of historical debate.

To a large extent the claim to catholicity depended on the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession. This was not a doctrine invented by the Tractarians. The central ideas of Tractarianism, among them the Apostolic Succession, that the Tractarians sought to restore and revive, not to invent, had been preserved by a continuous stream of High Churchmen throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Tractarians took that strain of thought, not extinguished, and sought to re-articulate it and to weave those "High Church" perspectives into a more extensive and more coherent ecclesiology. As John Henry Newman said, "the royal dynasty of the apostles is far older than all the kingly families which are now on the earth. Every bishop of the Church whom we behold, is a lineal descendant of S. Peter and S. Paul after the order of a spiritual birth."<sup>8</sup> It was well put in an influential and accessible *vade mecum* of Anglo-Catholic doctrine published in 1893, and frequently re-printed, Vernon Staley's *The Catholic Religion*<sup>9</sup> which said that the apostolic succession was continued without a break, with bishops being consecrated throughout the Reformation and after by bishops of the old apostolic line. The sacraments, deriving their security and value from the apostolic succession, were continued. The appeal to antiquity, to the Primitive Church,

---

<sup>7</sup> James Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement: At the Heart of Tractarianism* Oxford, UP {2008} p 233

<sup>8</sup> John Henry Newman, *Parochial Sermons* III pp 268 - 270

<sup>9</sup> London, Mowbray [1893] p. 67

to the Early Fathers of the Church, as a test of truth was more dominant than it had been before and more fully worked out. "Thus," Staley concluded, "the English Church, by God's mercy, issued from the Reformation a true and living branch of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ."

Perhaps the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession was expounded rather too crudely and mechanically but the Tractarians wanted to achieve an awareness of the true character of the bishop as the symbol of the divine origin of the whole Church and as a man possessing the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole Body of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The bishop is the guardian of the deposit of faith, the guarantor of the teaching office of the Church and the Tractarians were clear that without the discipline and the control of the teaching office of the Church and its sacramental ministry, there can be a degeneration into irreverence and over-familiarity. John Henry Newman was anxious that people were speaking "of the adorable works of Christ with the familiarity and absence of awe with which we speak about our friends."<sup>11</sup> The importance of the Church is that she prevents the individual from leaping into subjective religiosity.<sup>12</sup> The salvation of the individual is accomplished in and through a redeemed society.

With the Church of England poised, as it were, between Rome and Geneva, John Henry Newman developed his concept of the *Via Media*, the golden mean between protestantism and Catholicism, the "English Church shall so interpret Catholicism to the protestant world, that Catholicism shall be discovered as the final defence of truth and freedom: and shall so interpret freedom under the eyes of Rome." This claim was one that proved attractive. It provided a coherent argument of a Church continuous with the past but with a greater freedom of ecumenical outlook than Rome was prepared to countenance and without acknowledging the intrusion of protestantism, whether Lutheran and Calvinistic, in the formularies of the Church of England. It was a theological high-wire act at which Newman was particularly adept. To defend themselves against accusations from protestants of "Popery" - the rallying-cry of the mob in England - the Tractarians' writings contained a good deal of anti-Roman polemic. But they were equally clear that they rejected protestantism. However, these are themes that I wish to address in my lecture of Ecumenism as the last in this series.

The Tractarian appeal to and defence of the Apostolic Succession, the supremacy of Holy Scripture, the defence of the Catholic creeds, the Prayer Book and the Catechism, the dogmatic principle, the doctrine of sacramental grace, the divine basis of political allegiance and social obligation was rooted in the Primitive Church, in the writings of the Early Fathers. Dr Pusey, when asked what was Puseyism, the Movement that bore his name after Newman's conversion said: "It is difficult to say what people mean when they designate a class of views by my name; for since they are no peculiar doctrines, but it is rather a temper of mind which is so designated, it will vary according to the individual who uses it. Generally speaking, what is so designated may be reduced under the following heads; and what people mean to blame is what to them appears an excess of them.

1. High thoughts of the two Sacraments.

---

<sup>10</sup> Roy Porter, *Apostasy Now*, in *Tracts for Our Times 1833 - 1983* London, St Mary's, Bourne Street [1983] p. 3

<sup>11</sup> *Op cit* Newman PS p. 7

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p. 6

2. High estimate of Episcopacy as God's ordinance.
3. High estimate of the visible Church as the Body wherein we are made and continue to be members of Christ.
4. Regard for ordinances, as directing our devotions and disciplining us, such as daily public prayers, fasts and feasts, etc.
5. Regard for the visible part of devotion, such as the decoration of the house of God, which acts insensibly on the mind.
6. Reverence for and deference to the ancient Church, of which our own Church is looked upon as the representative to us, and by whose views and doctrines we interpret our own Church when her meaning is questioned or doubtful; in a word, reference to the ancient Church, instead of the Reformers, as the ultimate expounder of the meaning of our Church."<sup>13</sup>

The Early Church was the home of what the Tractarians called the Catholic or Apostolic "ethos" and was summarised in the words of S. Vincent of Lerins, that which was believed everywhere, always and by all, a universal consent. "We within the Catholic Church are to take care that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all men, [ubique, semper, ad omnibus] and that we shall do if we follow universality, antiquity and consent." Antiquity became an absolute standard for the Tractarians and a final court of appeal for their ethos, preaching and writing. The rediscovery of the Primitive, Early Church was not new, not something invented by the Tractarians. Many scholars both during the Reformation and in the centuries after had known the Early Church Fathers and had often seen them as a touchstone. The Tractarians, however, "drove the principle further, so far beyond the generally accepted boundaries that their attitude towards [the Early Fathers] has been described as 'patristic fundamentalism'."<sup>14</sup> In the Early Fathers the Tractarians found a purity of doctrine and were keen to preserve it. They maintained that the Church of England had lost, or at best neglected, the ethos of the Early Fathers and they needed to recover it. So the Tracts and the scholars of the Oxford Movement set out to find what they feared was an endangered heritage of Catholic doctrine and devotion. They did so because that was where the Church as a Divine Society could locate its authority. If they denied the authority of the State to legislate for that society, if they rejected the erastian principle, they needed to locate an authority elsewhere. The question of authority lies at the heart of the Tractarian and Anglo-Catholic dilemma.

As early as Tract I Newman sets out the grounds upon which the Church could claim authority as a Divine Society and not as an arm of the State. Newman asked, "On what are we to rest our authority when the state deserts us?"<sup>15</sup> His answer was that "the real ground on which our authority is built [is] our apostolic descent ... We have been born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The Lord Jesus Christ gave his spirit to the Apostles; they in turn laid their hands on those who should succeed them: and these again on others; and so the sacred gift has been handed down to our present bishops, who have appointed us as their assistants, and in

---

<sup>13</sup> Liddon, *Life of Pusey* ii 140

<sup>14</sup> *Op cit* Pereiro, p. 234

<sup>15</sup> John Henry Newman, *Tract 1* The Rocket Press [1985] p. 15

some sense representatives ... Exalt our Holy Fathers, the bishops, as representatives of the Apostles, and the Angels of the Churches."<sup>16</sup>

Not quite how we would look at our bishops today, I suspect. Yet, Newman was right. For Newman bishops were the successors of the Apostles, not state functionaries, not the administrators of an ecclesial organisation, but the authentic and authoritative guardians of a divine institution. Their authority in teaching and in government was of divine origin. The apostolic ministry was essential for any particular church to have a claim to be part of the true Church, and for its sacraments to be valid sacraments. From the Apostles themselves bishops had inherited the plenitude of apostolic power and authority. The implications of Newman's heady rhetoric are still with us, and now in particularly acute form.

The controversies that have engaged the Catholic Revival, and those that presently engulf us, centre on the question of authority: the authority of the Church against the state: the authority of the Church to act as an autonomous body independent of state control: the nature of the authority that can be ascribed to the sources of the teaching of the Church: the authority of Scripture: the authority of the Tradition, of the Fathers of the Church. The catholic and apostolic nature of the Church is essentially an ecclesial matter, a question of an ecclesiastical polity but it also needs to be seen against a wider cultural context. The Tractarians were engaged not only in an ecclesial battle but in a fundamental cultural conflict. In his book *Glorious Battle*,<sup>17</sup> John Sheldon Reed draws an important parallel between Anglo-Catholicism and the youthful protest movement of the 1960s. It is not, you might think, on the face of it a propitious comparison, not a natural setting for us and our kind. "Both movements," he writes, "exemplify a phenomenon increasingly common in the cultural politics of modern industrial society ... Each stood in opposition to some dominant values of its time and place ... Both were ... counter-cultural movements."<sup>18</sup> We can see the force and persuasive character of these remarks in John Keble's sermon on the National Apostasy which was an attack on the prevailing and predominant Whig political culture and the subordination of the Church to an unsympathetic political will. As the historian David Newsome has commented, "The Oxford Movement might have come at any time during the 1830s but its militant shape was unquestionably precipitated by the Whig government's intention to place church reform at the top of its legislative agenda."<sup>19</sup>

We can appreciate it in the *Tracts for the Times* which dissected the prevailing latitudinarian ethos of the Church of England and proposed an alternative rooted in the Caroline Divines and in the patristic writings of the Early Church. We can also see, as complementary to those doctrinal and ecclesial reassertions, the historical iconoclasm of Richard Hurrell Froude with his ferociously scornful attack on the Reformers of the sixteenth century which so undermined the predominant cultural assumptions of English and Anglican societies. In a later generation, we can see it in the defiance of the ritualist clergy pitted, not only against a largely unsympathetic and hostile bench of bishops, but against the protestant state in its parliamentary legislation. We see it in the

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* p. 17 p. 19

<sup>17</sup> John Sheldon Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* Vanderbilt UP, [1996]

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p xxi

<sup>19</sup> David Newsome, *The Victorian Word Picture* London, John Murray [1997] pp 57 – 58

Anglican Papalism of the 1920s and 1930s; in the revival of the cult of the saints and most particularly in the restoration of Our Lady's Shrine at Walsingham. We see it, surely, within ourselves pitched as we are against a resolutely secular state, and against a Church seduced by the values of worldly ambition and secular presumptions, imprisoned in a post-Enlightenment culture. At its heart Anglo-Catholicism is a counter-cultural phenomenon, one that is always at odds with the prevalent and dominant hegemony in both Church and state. We witness it no less acutely than our forefathers in the Oxford Movement.

Were John Henry Newman to write *Tract I* today in the present condition of the Church of England, what might he say? The question to us would, I suspect, be the same, on what grounds do we stand? I hesitate to assume the mantle of Newman and cannot match his matchless prose but here goes:

The precepts of men have taken hold in the Church of England, not least in its legislative manifestation. There is an increasing willingness to accommodate to the values of a vague liberal humanism entirely congruent with a post-Enlightenment ethic. Rather than refuse to acknowledge the jurisdiction and proscriptive right of the Enlightenment, the synods and councils of the Church have sought to justify their actions and doctrine at the bar of impartial and universal reason. It was a trial that they could not win. This was not only because reason is never impartial but because Enlightenment reason was conceived precisely and particularly in opposition to the Christian Faith, even more narrowly, the Catholic Faith. The Enlightenment claimed that its reason was sovereign in its own kingdom, the kingdom of thought and belief and took no account of its relation to the font of all reason, the divine logos. Thereby the legitimate foundations of doctrine, scripture and tradition, were transformed into history and experience the natural outcome of which was that experience and history were too weak and unstable a foundation for anything other than a liberal theology, that is finally no theology at all.<sup>20</sup>

We should be in no doubt, this is still a confessional state, but it is a state which by its pronouncements, its actions, its legislative programme declares itself to be no more than at best the neutral guardian of a plurality of values, beliefs and moral codes in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith society. It no longer regards itself as the embodiment of Christian truth: nor of any religious truth and points to the horrors of theocratic states in other parts of the world as conclusive proof of the integrity of its position. Whatever its justification, the state is not concerned with the enactment of a moral law with transcendent authority. All political parties are dedicated to the protection of a plurality of value systems. The state no longer regards itself as having a higher vocation. When one of those value systems becomes violently at odds with the liberal consensus, the state has ample coercive resources but few moral reserves to draw upon. The abandonment of its higher vocation means that government becomes a matter of regulation of material welfare and the amelioration of the worst excesses of social inequality.

The Church of England's response to the material values enunciated and implemented by a secular state, the implied status of the Christian religion as just one

---

<sup>20</sup> See Gerard Loughlin, The basis and authority of doctrine *The Cambridge Companion to Doctrine* (Ed. Colin E. Gunton) CUP [1997] p. 42

faith group among several, has been to acquiesce in the intellectual and moral boundaries of the modern polity and to adjust its own moral teaching and practice with only the occasional determined opposition to the encroachments of the state. We rarely witness an attempt to break out from the boundaries or the intellectual restrictions imposed by that polity, to challenge the assumptions that define the acceptable limits of the contemporary debate, and to articulate a specifically and recognizably Christian response contra-distinct from the premises that underpin and which circumscribe our political, cultural and social economy.

Modern theories of the state no longer countenance notions of a state possessed of a religious conscience; and once religious toleration is conceded, the state can only be neutral, not merely between Christian denominations but between religious faiths. This is expressed in the rhetoric of social inclusion (and who can reasonably be against that?) but it does mean a constitutional separation of the proceedings of the state from religious belief altogether; and it becomes unreasonable to expect anything else.

Within this context the Church of England's position as the national Church looks increasingly anomalous: it seems simply one pressure group among many. It cannot even claim to embody the conscience of the nation. Even the most cursory examination of the laws passed through Parliament and given the Royal Assent makes it clear that legislation is no longer promoted, nor enacted, on the basis that its moral foundation is an interpretation of Christian truth. That it is secular does not mean that it is devoid of ideological content. There is no such thing as moral neutrality, only moral emasculation. From the legislation itself, from the tidal wave of political explanation and explication that sweeps over us from think tanks, spin doctors and interest groups, it is obvious that the modern state is as ideologically confessional as its predecessors but now its ideology is secular rather than sacred, material humanism rather than charitable Christianity. We should be in no doubt of the sacred and infallible nature of the moral structure and assumptions which the modern state upholds.

We are not divorced from developments beyond our borders, nor from a wider culture. We may have followed with a degree of incredulity the argument in Europe over whether or not the new constitutional treaty for the European Union should include a reference to the Christian sources of European civilization. That so many European intellectuals and political leaders regarded any reference to the Christian sources of contemporary European civilization as some kind of threat to human rights and democracy illustrates painfully a crisis of Christian cultural civilization. But, of course, we are now in a post-Christian era, so we are told. European man has convinced himself that in order to be modern and free, he must be radically secular. But this is to forget history and the common thread that made us what we are. That common thread "is the conviction that the deepest currents of history are spiritual and cultural, rather than political and economic. History is not simply a by-product of the contest for power in the world. History is not the exhaust fumes produced by the means of Production, as the Marxists taught. History is driven by culture, by what men and women honour, cherish and worship; by the expression they give to those convictions in language, in literature, and the arts; by what individuals and societies are willing to stake their lives

on.”<sup>21</sup> Yet in the draft constitution of the European Union that was to form the basis of the treaty negotiations in June 2004, the roots of contemporary European civilization were outlined as a commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These were the classic heritage of the Enlightenment. Fifteen hundred years of Christian influence in the formation of Europe went un-remarked and unacknowledged.

The Tractarians were in large measure motivated by and were part of that reaction against the depredations and irreligion of the French Revolution, the Enlightenment and its anti-religious deification of rationalism. Both rationalism and utilitarianism permeated the assumptions of politics and religion against which the Tractarians reacted both intellectually and artistically. The intellectual arguments about the nature of a divine society and the consequences of the Incarnation for the sanctification of the world were given an added element through ritual and ceremonial that recaptured something of the mystery and the intuitive and the emotional in the experience of human souls. The Catholic Revival was a sensuous recovery of the engagement of the whole of human personality and not merely man’s capacity for reason.

It seems to me that the Anglo-Catholic Movement finds itself today much where it found itself in the earliest days but in a changed landscape and an even less sympathetic context. It finds itself now in a more antipathetic society and culture whose expressed values and behaviour are a denial of the truths and disciplines it holds, whose polity has done its best to extirpate its insights and precepts from political discourse; and an inhospitable ecclesial environment, in a Church which exhibits a liberal protestantism and promiscuous authority little different from that skewered by Newman, Pusey and Keble and the rest: distinguished only insofar as it has gone further by its unilateral action in articulating an explicit rejection of a Catholic understanding of itself: a church that is morally and doctrinally divided, financially compromised, hesitant and uncertain, but impelled on a course for the ordination of women to the episcopate (with or without adequate provision) that will only see the fault lines become deeper, wider, unfathomable and unbridgeable month by month.

Catholics continue to assert the fundamental Catholic nature of the Church of England which underpins its search for jurisdictional provision should women be ordained to the episcopate but it does so against a background of decisions in General Synod, which is where, *force majeure*, decisions now are made, that make it increasingly clear that the Synod’s self-understanding is of an autonomous institution with the right and ability to legislate on ministerial order, doctrine and ethics without reference to the wider body of Catholic Christendom. Consider the response to two speeches of Cardinal Kaspar, one to the House of Bishops and one to last year’s Lambeth Conference when his observations were seen as of little relevance because they were Roman Catholic, nothing to do with us. There was similar reaction when General Synod debated the latest ARCIC Report on Our Lady. One Synod member said to me that a majority of members, and not only Evangelicals, was no longer interested in ecumenism leading to reunion with Rome. Ecumenical friendliness was all right but that was as far as it was likely to go.

---

<sup>21</sup> George Weigel, *Politics without God? Reflections on Europe and America* 10 December 2004. Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

Catholics continue to hang on to the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession although it has been achieved with a degree of ecclesial novelty but even that will not survive, at least on present evidence, if Synod and Parliament approve women bishops without provision. It is a basic Tractarian tenet that the apostolic and priestly ministry that is exercised in the Church of England, despite the fluctuations of history, is that founded by Christ and handed down through his Apostles. Clearly since 1992 that ministry has changed. Some Catholics regard that as a slight change, a natural development. The Principal of Pusey House will have much more to say about the doctrine of Development next week but as a trailer I recall some words of Dr Geoffrey Rowell when preaching at another London Anglic-Catholic Church in November 1992: "By implication the Church of England, through its constitutional organs of government, agreed to enact legislation which can only be justified ecclesiologically as a development of doctrine ... If the Church of England claims authority to develop the tradition in this way we should be clear that it is claiming for the first time an authority to discern what is such a development of doctrine, where Scripture or Tradition are either silent or may be cited against it ... It is acting in a protestant way ... but is applying Roman Catholic arguments."<sup>22</sup> Whereas some Catholics could accommodate and welcome such a development, those Catholics who saw the Church of England as part of something greater and wider took note of the views of the Orthodox Church and of the Catholic Church and accommodated themselves with the provisions that were made to enable them in good conscience to remain.

The question now before us and moving to its Synodical conclusion is even more acute. It is, again, a question of authority. The Tractarians located the Church's authority from Christ and his Apostolic successors to the present day. The bishop will no longer be the focus of unity, but the exact opposite. The bishop will not have undisputed authority. The appeal to Antiquity, the Early Church Fathers and the Tradition cuts no ice with those pursuing this aim. Synodical reports are more comfortable quoting the authority of earlier Synodical reports than the Fathers of Antiquity or the Divines of the seventeenth century. An appeal to the New Testament and to Apostolic teaching is replaced with a sense of what is right, what is just, what is appropriate for my vocation. The appeal to the Reformation, that then the Church of England made its own decisions so why not now, ignores the fact that the Reformation is for many historians debateable territory, that there is a dislocation between scholarly and popular perceptions and that the Reformation can be read as rediscovering elements of the tradition, such as married priests, rather than breaking with the tradition.

Those Catholics in the Church of England who accept the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate will undoubtedly witness to a catholic sensibility, a catholic taste, a catholic feel for liturgy, but without the underpinning of doctrine and the tradition that is all that it will be, a sensibility. It will be Catholicism-lite. It will give weight to the jibes that Anglo-Catholicism is protestantism in fancy dress, salvation by haberdashery.

Newman's question cannot be much longer avoided: where do we stand?

---

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Rowell (then Chaplain of Keble College, Oxford), *The Church of the Cross A Sermon preached in All Saints' Margaret Street on the Feast of Christ the King (22 November 1992)*