

'Geoffrey Rowell: Historian and Theologian of Anglo-Catholicism'

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Thank you very much for inviting me here today, and I'm very sorry that, because of the way I've had to squeeze this into a day of prior commitments, I couldn't be here earlier and I can't stay much beyond the end of this talk. To paraphrase Shakespeare, I come not to praise Geoffrey, but to evaluate him. Praise would be easy and certainly merited, but I'm probably not the best-placed person here to do that: I knew him fairly well, but not as well as many of you here. The last time I saw him was in Rome in April 2016, when he attended a week-long meeting of the Malines Conversations Group, and participated in our discussions with that characteristic combination of good humour and careful learning that I for one will always associate with him. We had many conversations that week, and in particular a coach journey together back from the Vatican to the Villa Palazzola above Lake Albano which gave him the chance to pump me for as much Oxbridge gossip as he could get out of me – a conversation I have to say that was probably pure pleasure for both of us.

But it is his work as a historian and theologian of Anglo-Catholicism that I've been asked to address, and therefore what I am going to try to do is to reach an assessment of his view of the cause to which you could say he dedicated his scholarly life. I've read a lot of Geoffrey's work over the years, but in some cases many years ago, and certainly not in a concentrated period of time. I've not read him, in other words, to assess *his* view, so much as to learn from what he had to say about things of mutual interest. I've found re-reading him with the focus squarely on the shape of his own interpretation of Anglo-Catholicism extraordinarily enlightening, not just because he is always at once readable and informative, but because there is, I think, something unexpected or surprising that I had never noticed before, which seems to me crucial to understanding how he came to view his own tradition, and by extension Anglicanism as a whole. And I would summarize that 'surprise' as a growing preoccupation with the conundrum which John Henry Newman famously tried to address in the last of his *University Sermons*, and in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, namely the fundamental question that any historian who is also a person of faith must in some sense address – how does the Church, as the bearer of eternal truth, remain the same in a changing world when it is, as a human institution, itself subject to change? I found that a 'surprise', because it reflects something more personal in Geoffrey's own journey of faith, and I could characterize that as a shift away from John Keble to Newman. But more on that in a moment. So what I am going to do is, first, to give an outline of Geoffrey's scholarly work and to try from that to summarize his overall position on Anglo-Catholicism; second, to see how well that has stood up to trends in contemporary scholarship over the last forty or so years, particularly coming up to the present; and finally, to open out these reflections into a broader review of Geoffrey's conception of Anglicanism.

A proper assessment of Geoffrey's scholarship has to begin from the two substantial books he published, *Hell and the Victorians* (1974), and *The Vision Glorious* (1983). These were, in his career, relatively early works, and they help us to understand how his subsequent work, often written in the interstices of episcopal commitments, was based on the very solid bedrock of an extraordinary breadth of reading in nineteenth-century theology, and of course Anglo-Catholicism in particular, undertaken in his 20s and 30s. In one of his later essays he speaks of a triumvirate of Cambridge historians who influenced him profoundly as a student – Alec Vidler, David Newsome, and Owen Chadwick.¹ Newsome supervised his doctorate, but Chadwick got him to check references for his two-volume magnum opus, *The Victorian Church* (1966-70); as Geoffrey said in a letter to the *Times* after Chadwick's death, "he knew that I would have to take every book he had used off the shelves of the Cambridge University Library to do so, thus giving me a remarkable introduction to a vast range of primary sources".² You can see the effect of this early breadth in *Hell and the Victorians*. It is a masterly summary of the whole range of theological responses to one of the central contested doctrines of the Victorian period, eternal punishment. It covers Unitarians, Evangelical, Broad Church and High Church Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, and universalists. It is a scrupulously fair book, in which the author's own views are muted and confined mostly to pointing out the consequences of particular positions for later discussion; only a really attentive reader would notice how his comments on Tractarian eschatology resonate with some elements of his concluding reflections – of the Tractarians, "It was because God was holy that hell was a reality to them...the issues of life are momentous...the choices are serious", and of himself, "We cannot do without a doctrine of hell, for it stands as a vitally important reminder of the reality and seriousness of the experience of alienation, isolation, and estrangement".³ It has not been surpassed by any later account, though usefully supplemented by Michael Wheeler and by a variety of books on particular theologians.⁴

The Vision Glorious was by far Geoffrey's most substantial contribution to Anglo-Catholic history. It was written to mark the 150th anniversary of Keble's Assize Sermon, which Newman took as the real start of the Oxford Movement.⁵ The sub-title, 'Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism', gives a strong clue to what the book is, and is not. It is not a comprehensive study, nor even a narrative as such. Geoffrey leans on a long list of established accounts – Newman's *Apologia* (1864), Richard Church's history (1890), Brilioth's *Anglican Revival* (1925), Chadwick's *Mind of the Oxford Movement* (1960), Newsome's *Parting of Friends* (1966), to name but a few.⁶ These were the books that shaped almost everyone's view of the Catholic revival well into the 1980s, and they are there in the background of Geoffrey's study. His book is not a reshaping of the picture these authorities painted, but it is a refinement, drawing out a series of cameos of personalities (Keble, Newman, Pusey, John Mason Neale, Edward King, and more minor figures), and of themes of mission, slum ministry, and ecumenical relations. To call them 'cameos' is not to diminish them. They are marvels of concentrated scholarship and theological acumen, dedicated to proving an argument that was of course also a personal commitment, namely that Tractarianism "was far from being simply a reactionary movement...It was more creative theologically than that, and it was so primarily because it drew so deeply from the Fathers".⁷ The achievement of the book was, above all, twofold. Certainly it demonstrated the theological creativity and depth of the Oxford leaders and their most famous followers. He took Keble seriously as a theologian as well as poet and pastor, and went beyond Owen Chadwick's famous essay (a criticism of Georgina Battiscombe's biography), 'The limitations of Keble' (an ironic title, of course). Chadwick praised Keble, but there is criticism there too: "Keble was no theologian...No one will utter the phrase *breadth of mind*

about Keble".⁸ For Geoffrey, clearly this wasn't enough: Keble may have been a staunchly conservative defender of the old confessional State, but "equally, his sense of the Catholic Church as wider than the Church of England and with a richer heritage than many contemporary churchmen recognized, redeemed the Oxford Movement from mere conservative parochialism."⁹ Pusey he saw as embodying the 'genius' of the Oxford Movement in its "rediscovery of the reality of sacramental grace" and its "refusal, similar to that of Kierkegaard, to confine theology to the domain of the speculative".¹⁰ But the book also broadened and deepened our sense of the influence of the Movement: Geoffrey showed how its practical, missionary theology took it well beyond the academy, into what the Victorians called 'darkest England', the inner-city slums, and the challenging mission fields of Africa, the Far East and the Pacific Rim. And right at the end, there was a brief personal testimony: quoting one of Keble's last sermons, on the 'deification' of those saints on whom the Spirit had descended, he claimed that that "is the vision glorious by which so many strove to live; a vision which endures because it is the gift of eternal life".¹¹

To those two books, there is an impressively long list of other articles and book chapters by Geoffrey, including some substantial pieces on Anglican theological history, and others on particular doctrines or liturgical practices in which he took an interest. There is enough there, I would have thought, to justify a posthumous volume of essays on Anglican history and theology – just a thought. It is not what would now pass in the University world for a substantial research profile, but that is probably a measure of the way in which artificial and vapid standards for research productivity have been imposed on scholarship over the last twenty years. The mania for peer-reviewed, technical journal articles as the gold standard on which an academic career will be built risks draining the life and soul out of the humanities, and it poses special problems for church history when that discipline in particular is being squeezed out of theological education. This was in part the stuff of my last conversation with Geoffrey, as you can well imagine. His research profile may have been thin by today's standards, but my goodness his published bibliography is testimony to an extraordinarily rich and broad immersion in the world of Catholic Anglican history and theology, in the ecumenical movement, and wider still, in poetry, imaginative literature and the life of the mind. You get the measure of the particular fusion of devotion and learning he typified when you consider that he could end a learned essay on Anglicanism's treatment of the creeds of the early Church with the claim that the first reaction to the Christian message "must be wonder. Speculation without wonder is a soul-destroying thing, and a doctrine is deadly if the sense of mystery is not woven into it."¹² What is that if not a Tractarian sensibility?

But it is worth just pressing this question of research profile a little further, if I may. There is the obvious point that, from his late 40s, he was busy as a suffragan and then diocesan bishop; he didn't have to time to do the kind of constantly new, original work required of academics now. But more to the point, even his two major books have a different approach from some of the historians who have helped to shape our understanding of the Victorian Church. Geoffrey was essentially a historical theologian: his material was mostly published texts, and he studied and reflected deeply on the lives and works of the great Anglican theologians. He was not a historian whose work was based primarily on research in the archives, on unpublished material including institutional records. It is a rare historian who can be both a historical theologian and a successful trawler through archives: Owen Chadwick was certainly one, but even then whilst his best books in my view were those

which reconstructed the past through particular unpublished sources – *Victorian Miniature* (1960), *Mackenzie's Grave* (1959), *The Founding of Cuddesdon* (1954) – with a novelist's capacity for breathing life into apparently dead or mundane material, Geoffrey was a better theologian, a better interpreter of theological texts than Owen.¹³ But he was not someone who would change the subject through intense, sustained archival work, what some historians a bit unfairly regard as the 'real thing'. Let me mention just three books in nineteenth century studies that stand in marked contrast. Geoffrey Best's *Temporal Pillars* (1964), a magisterial history of Queen Anne's Bounty and the Church Commissioners, is the only book so far published seriously to grapple with the intricacies of ecclesiastical finance and estates management in the period, and to demonstrate how fundamental these apparently dull matters were to the reshaping of the modern Church of England.¹⁴ Arthur Burns' *Diocesan Revival* (1999) is effectively a companion study, showing how diocesan organization was thoroughly overhauled and improved.¹⁵ And Frances Knight's *Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* (1998) uses a close study of diocesan sources, especially from Lincoln, to reconstruct the process of management and change by which the pastoral provision of the Church of England was reformed.¹⁶

Geoffrey was trying to do something different. He was trying to understand and interpret for today the great figures of Anglo-Catholic history, and in doing that, to re-present or reappropriate that tradition for his own age. So his work was both biographical and theological. And central to that was his deep appreciation of John Keble. Indeed, Chadwick himself called Geoffrey "the leading expert on Keble in our day".¹⁷ If I had to single out any figure to whose spirituality Geoffrey seems (to me) closest, it would be Keble. Geoffrey himself noted how in Keble the intellectual was in line with the moral, faith and reason harmonized together.¹⁸ He warmed, clearly, to Keble's conviction that theology was poetic, and that prayer, not controversy, was the first weapon in any dispute in the Church.¹⁹ These are all, I think, comments you could make of Geoffrey himself. Moreover, Geoffrey appreciated deeply in Keble his instinctive conservatism – which expressed not mere reaction, as we have heard, but a reverence for the wisdom of the Christian past, and an appropriate humility – and his sense (again, poetic, but also of course sacramental) that God's truth was best sought out not in linguistic formulae, but in the beauty of creation. Keble's theology, he said, was "a theology of transfiguration, the glory of God revealed in every part of creation and in his gracious drawing of men and women to himself".²⁰ And again, Geoffrey's own appreciation of poetry, music and literature found a basic affinity in Keble's own poetry – that much is very clear from the seriousness with which he read Keble's poetry theologically. One might very well speculate that it may have been from Keble's willingness to withstand the storms of ecclesiastical division through concentration on a life of prayer and meditation and humble service – that famous comment that if the Church of England were to fail, it would be found in his parish – that Geoffrey himself found inspiration to carry on when much that he valued about Anglicanism seemed in imminent danger of collapse.²¹

But it wouldn't be true to say that, for Geoffrey, Keble simply embodied everything that was lasting and true about Anglo-Catholicism. He was shaped by and he valued the sacramental and meditative spirituality of Keble, and saw it as central to Anglo-Catholicism. But he also realized that the doctrinal and moral challenges the Church of England faced could not be resolved simply by the resuscitation of Keble's spirit; by implication Keble's own work wasn't sufficient to that task. Rather, it seems to me that Geoffrey found himself

drawn ever more closely to engagement with the theology of Newman, for in Newman he found perhaps the most honest and faithful yet constructive attempt to grapple with the conundrum I mentioned at the beginning – how does a tradition change, as it must, and yet remain the same? It's hardly surprising that we find Geoffrey returning to Newman again and again through the 1990s and 2000s. In an address to the Modern Churchpeople's Union in 2010 he said of Newman that the more he studied him "the more creative a theologian I believe him to be".²² Newman, for Geoffrey, was a theologian profoundly aware of the limitations as well as the necessity of doctrinal formulation: of all the Tractarians, he said Newman was most aware that "doctrinal definition can be both a creative crystallization and also a narrowing".²³ Newman was thus a "reluctant definer".²⁴ This, I think, echoed with Geoffrey, and in the *Vision Glorious* he pointed out how, as a result, Newman was for a long time critical of the "scholastic, legal ethos" of Roman theology, which "substituted a technical and formal obedience for the spirit of love".²⁵ Faith, devotion and theology had an "organic unity" which could be destroyed by systematic formalism, but also by the "unfettered exercise of private judgement" typical of liberalism and Evangelicalism.²⁶ This justified Newman's sense of Anglicanism as the *via media*, but, as everyone knows, Newman came to lose faith in the living reality of that vision of Anglicanism: it was but a 'paper religion'.²⁷ That perception, fuelled by a growing fear after Tract 90 that the bishops simply could not or would not take the steps necessary to make that paper religion a living one, drove Newman towards the conviction that Catholic consent remained where it had always been – in the Roman communion. The *Essay on Development* was the intellectual means by which he could reconcile himself to the apparent gap between primitive Christianity and the Roman church. Plainly, Geoffrey could not follow Newman quite that far. But he sensed acutely the resultant challenge to his Anglican convictions. Where was Catholic consent for the dramatic changes he witnessed taking place in the Anglican Communion in his day? As it was said in one of his obituaries, when he became Bishop of Europe he told women priests in his diocese "I will give you all the support I can, but what I can't give you is Catholic consent".²⁸

Geoffrey's reading of Anglo-Catholicism was, to sum up, one broadly in line with the established scholarship he knew so well. It had, he believed, refocused Anglican theology on its Patristic sources and its seventeenth-century lights; it had renewed the sacramental spirituality of Anglicanism, unleashed a new energy in mission at home and overseas, and renewed attention on the central nature of the incarnation in Christian faith. It had done this through a range of exceptional theologians and leaders, in the face of much opposition. The Oxford Movement was, he said, a "revolution by tradition"; *ecclesia semper reformanda* was always "in one way or another, an appeal to roots".²⁹ It was, he believed, a profoundly ecumenical way of faith too. "It was those influenced by the Oxford Movement", he said, "who first sought to build ecumenical bridges" in ways that had borne fruit in the wake of Vatican II.³⁰ Drawing inspiration himself from Orthodox Christianity, as well as from Roman Catholicism, if his own attention was drawn ineluctably in that direction, nonetheless his intellectual sympathies were broad enough to give him insight into the views of Evangelical Anglicanism and the Free Churches.³¹ But he did more than simply shadow the work of great predecessors: he added immeasurably to our understanding of the theological tradition of Anglo-Catholicism through his penetrating knowledge of its great theologians.

How has this reading of Anglo-Catholicism stood up to recent historical and theological work? On the theological side – and I’m going to say least on this – it has stood up remarkably well. In fact, Geoffrey’s own work was an intrinsic part of the theological rehabilitation of Tractarianism, and that trend I think has some momentum left in it yet. In the last half-century there has been a veritable industry of research on Newman; Geoffrey’s work was much in sympathy with that. So, for example, Ben King’s study of *Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers* (2009) runs with the grain of Geoffrey’s work.³² So does James Pereiro’s monograph on *‘Ethos’ and the Oxford Movement* (2008).³³ Geoffrey appreciated the new critical biographies by Ian Ker (1988) and Sheridan Gilley (1990).³⁴ He reviewed and appreciated successive volumes of Newman’s *Letters and Diaries* as they appeared in print.³⁵ He certainly approved of the saving of Pusey’s reputation from the hands of an earlier generation of traducers. Scholars such as Perry Butler, Rowan Strong, and Tim Larsen have opened up new lines of appreciation of Pusey’s depth and originality, and shown him to be much more than the blinkered champion of a sterile orthodoxy he was once assumed to be.³⁶ A similar process of renewed appreciation is under way for Liddon, Neale, Isaac Williams and other figures.³⁷ And of course Keble himself is also undergoing rehabilitation – a process that began perhaps with Stephen Prickett - though I’d argue we have scarcely begun to study his theology with the systematic scope it deserves.³⁸

But it is the wider, historical context to which we need to turn to appreciate both the strengths and perhaps the limitations of Geoffrey’s historical work, for here much has changed in the last thirty years. Central to our understanding of the Oxford Movement is, now, the work of Peter Nockles. His *Oxford Movement in Context* (1994) has done much more than the title modestly suggests.³⁹ It has repositioned the Movement, by demonstrating the continuing vitality and influence of High Church Anglicanism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (against the grain of Tractarian readings of the past), clear elements of continuity between that tradition and Tractarianism, and at the same time the sharpness and intensity with which the Tractarian hyper-emphasis on the doctrine of apostolic succession (exemplified in Newman’s *Tract 1*, ‘On the Ministerial Commission’) effectively ‘un-churched’ non-episcopal churches.⁴⁰ Geoffrey hugely appreciated the immense thoroughness and breadth of Nockles’s work.

That work has opened up continuities with other strands of historiography in at least two ways. Tractarian mythology – Richard Church was particularly guilty of this, but so was Tom Mozley – tended to emphasize the theological vitality of the Movement by denigrating the Anglicanism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴¹ By calling this into question, Nockles has re-rooted Tractarian studies in the movement of historical revisionism that has completely recast our understanding of the Church of England in the eighteenth century. The old caricature of hunting, non-resident gentry clergy more concerned with their stomachs than their duties has been substantially overturned. A spate of works, represented above all by an edited volume produced by John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor in 1993, has shown how, far from being inert, inefficient, corrupt, and theologically effete or latitudinarian, churches were generally well-attended, and clergy were for the most part devout, diligent and theologically orthodox.⁴² Supported by a series of other studies by historians such as Donald Spaeth, Mark Smith, F.C. Mather, and Bill Jacob, amongst others,

this revisionism has implied that a different narrative is required to explain how the nineteenth-century revival of High Churchmanship came about – one that makes a steady, confessional ‘High’ theology of order more central, but acknowledges its at best muted sacramentalism, its relative lack of devotional intensity, and its apparent inability to cope effectively at first with the upsurge in Evangelical dissent during the Napoleonic wars.⁴³

But, second, Nockles’s work has also thus demonstrated affinities with another stream of historiography. By also emphasizing the theological novelty of Tractarianism, and in particular its intensifying or ‘supercharging’ of the doctrine of apostolical succession, Nockles helped to illuminate the way in which a more traditional High Churchmanship survived and even thrived alongside Tractarianism throughout the nineteenth century. This is what Arthur Burns’s work effectively showed: the diocesan revival was more the result of the work of orthodox High Churchmen than it was of the Tractarians themselves. As Burns puts it, sharply, the controversy which surrounded the Oxford Movement “vitiating its effectiveness as an ideology underpinning practical reform”, for few orthodox High Churchmen could reconcile “the theoretical emphasis on episcopal authority in the *Tracts* with what they regarded as the authors’ repeated provocation and defiance of an episcopate bravely resisting strong pressure to act decisively against Puseyism.”⁴⁴ Clive Dewey’s work on the circle around William Lyall, Dean of Canterbury, and Philip Barrett’s exhaustive account of cathedral reform tend in the same direction; to some extent my own work on F.D. Maurice does the same.⁴⁵ In a more general sense, and I admit with some controversy, I have argued in the *High Church Revival in the Church of England* (2016) that the term ‘High Church revival’ is actually a better term for what happened in the Victorian Church than ‘Anglo-Catholic revival’, since ‘Anglo-Catholic’ usually (not always – who says consistency is necessary?) implies a somewhat narrower range of reference than, strictly, ‘High Church’.⁴⁶ Now again, none of this shift in focus is a direct contradiction of Geoffrey’s view of Tractarianism; but it does suggest a broader, more complex account of the revival than you would find on the whole in his writing.

And that impression is a little underscored by the emergence and flourishing of a stream of historiography that has tangential reference to Anglo-Catholicism, but is absolutely central to the study of religion in modern British society, and that is the discipline of the social history of religion. I can’t deal with this at length now, but its leading spirits are historians such as Hugh McLeod, Jeffrey Cox, Sarah Williams, Callum Brown and Simon Green.⁴⁷ If you really want to understand the broader social and religious context of Anglo-Catholicism in Britain, you have to grapple with this work, because it recasts conventional views of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a period of long institutional failure for the churches, and instead shows how, mostly, this was a time of great institutional revival. *All* sections of the Church of England were flourishing in the period: Anglo-Catholic revival was predicated, not on a sort of unique cultural revolt against powerful secularizing trends, but on a general religious revival. Little of this, to be honest, was reflected directly in Geoffrey’s work, though as I’ve said already his particular concentration on historical theology was relatively unaffected by it.

So Geoffrey’s view of Anglo-Catholicism has not been undermined or marginalized by these historiographical trends, but it has been placed in a new context. His astute

theological awareness I think protected him against the temptation to see Anglo-Catholic history simply as exotic or eccentric. I remember him years ago saying to me that Bill Pickering's depiction of Anglo-Catholicism as characterised by ambiguity needed to be answered.⁴⁸ He, with others, was at the forefront of those arguing for the creativity and depth of Tractarian theology, and that in itself is a modern trend in church history, part of a wider rehabilitation of religion in the whole panorama of British history as even secular historians now increasingly see it.⁴⁹ He also warmed to the idea that the revival had to be seen as part of a continent-wide religious revival in the years after the depredations of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, a revival that drew on the Romantic movement and sought in various ways to put religion back into local social life. And although he did not really do institutional history, or the social history of religion, his work stands on its own as a serious treatment of its subject.

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But I want to turn to one more perspective, heading towards a conclusion, because we have to be aware – Geoffrey himself certainly was – that there is, or was, a wider dimension to his work, and that is what some would call the question of Anglican identity. Now this is a big question indeed, and it really would demand another lecture, but it seems to me essential to reach at least a provisional view of how Geoffrey approached this, to see what – standing back – one can make, finally, of his work as a historian and theologian of Anglo-Catholicism. I've already pointed out how – as it seems to me – he remained preoccupied with the question of doctrinal development, through his reading of Newman and his experience of contemporary Anglicanism. I think the two facets of his intellectual makeup were equally at play in the way he approached this question – the historian, and the theologian. Re-reading him, I've been struck again and again by the ease with which he could summon up some seemingly trivial fact or minor observation to frame, historically, his treatment of a theological subject. In one relatively late article, in a few sentences he could set the scene for the Oxford Movement, drawing a connection that seems, as you read it, absolutely natural between the French Revolution and the collapse of the *ancien regime*, the fall of the old confessional state, Tract 1, Ultramontanism, and the formation of the Congregational Union in 1832.⁵⁰ In another, from another angle, he does virtually the same thing, this time referencing the royal reigns in which Newman was raised, to show that he was not a Victorian, but the product of an earlier age.⁵¹ He was always alert to historical context, and yet always also aware of theological implications. And since, as we have seen, his conception of theology included, with Keble and Newman, the notion of poetic truth, there was a Romantic (I don't mean sentimental) or Coleridgean dimension of his thinking that saw the imagination, and deep feeling, as guides to truth. He quoted with approval David Brown – a theologian for whom I know he had great admiration – who said “the power of meditative practices lies precisely in their ability to force us beyond standing apart from the words into inhabiting what they are trying to convey”.⁵² By implication, truth could not be captured and hemmed in completely and definitively in logical formulae; it was crucial we recognized, with Newman, the “theme of implicit reasoning, and of mysteries which cannot be expressed fully in words”.⁵³

This was important for Geoffrey's view of Anglicanism because, despite his utterly sincere and firm adherence to tradition, he was also open to the limitations of particular readings of tradition. His quite surprising contribution to a conference of the Modern Church People's Union makes much of a distinction between liberalism and liberality - a distinction which may have been influenced ultimately by reading Charles Gore, but which ostensibly he got from Alec Vidler. Liberalism was, according to Vidler, as Geoffrey approvingly indicated, "too much concerned with negative criticism", whereas liberality was "a frame of mind, a quality of character...free from narrow prejudice, generous in the judgement of others, open-minded...It points to the *esprit large*".⁵⁴ The Catholic Christian could not be simply closed off from the exploration of change and of new perceptions of truth. This was also the view of Newman himself.⁵⁵ Now I'm not trying to turn Geoffrey into what he was not. He was not simply a liberal.

And as we know, he did not adopt liberal positions on matters of church order. Alongside that conference address one has to place an article he wrote in 1988 which does not appear in the bibliography as it was sent to me. It was written in response to moves in the Episcopal Church towards the ordination of a woman bishop, during the Lambeth Conference, and it is called 'Wreckers of church unity'. It is the strongest and sharpest written statement I have ever seen by Geoffrey of his views of this and related moves, though it is naturally calm and measured in its language. What is striking is the almost dialectical way in which he moves between the merits of Anglicanism as a theological tradition, along the lines I have indicated - its concern to seek naturally "for a comprehension of divergent opinion in secondary matters, and for a *via media* if not compromise" - and the fact, as he takes it, that "the universal tradition of almost 2,000 years restricting the episcopal and presbyterial [sic] ministry to men" cannot be shown conclusively to be a matter of culture only.⁵⁶ The dialectic leads inevitably to the view, for Geoffrey, that the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate needs "Far greater agreement and consensus within the Church of England, within the Anglican Communion, and above all with those who share with us a common ministry".⁵⁷ For him, it all raised what Newman himself had raised a century and a half before, namely the question of Anglican authority: unilateral action in effect created "a test of orthodoxy out of disputed doctrine".⁵⁸ It is a powerful piece. One does not have to agree with it to see that.

One person who certainly disagreed was Stephen Sykes, who had already ten years before dissected and anatomized the view Geoffrey represented in his *Integrity of Anglicanism* (1978).⁵⁹ For Sykes, comprehensiveness was a mirage, the Coleridgean way represented by F.D. Maurice and Michael Ramsey a fudge, the reluctance to define a fatal loss of nerve. Anglicans should make explicit the ecclesiology they already professed implicitly; but this would, in Sykes's view, mandate an evidently lower concept of church order than Geoffrey's, and certainly permit the ordination of women - he even, mischievously, suggested Richard Hooker might have agreed.⁶⁰ As we know, the markedly different views of Geoffrey and Stephen Sykes pointed to a breach opening up in Anglicanism in these years, and it was a breach that could never wholly be repaired again. Anglican identity has become a problematic concept - no less important for being problematic, however. Even recent attempts to pull a decent veil over the resulting incoherence by the notion of 'contestation' seem to me themselves fatally flawed, for it is simply not adequate to suggest that Anglican identity can be expressed satisfactorily by the

observation that it is ‘contested’.⁶¹ How can an identity be defined simply by its own contestation? This is obviously an unfinished agenda, that continues to fester even as we refuse as a Church to engage with it (though there are of course honourable exceptions to that observation).

The theologian and the historian were not separate entities for Geoffrey, but one integral whole, and as I hope I’ve shown, even when his scholarship was not the same in its methodology and implications as many of his academic peers, nonetheless the fact that he could hold these two disciplines together in one practice of historical theology gave his work a resonance and pliability that I think it will continue to hold. He was a sensitive advocate for the theological tradition to which equally as a matter of academic interest he was committed. And for that reason, I’ve no doubt recent years were hard ones. His loyalty to that tradition, and even to Anglicanism more widely, was clear in the stories he told – repeated at Palazzola when I last saw him – of Pope Benedict’s response to his question about what constituted ‘ecclesial community’: “You cannot be an *ecclesial* community without having the marks of the Church – and you Anglicans have them very deeply”.⁶² And in an echo of Ramsey’s *Gospel and the Catholic Church*, he could even say as recently as 2012, paraphrasing Charles Lock on Rose Macaulay, “an ecclesiology of a ruined church might have something significant to say. After all, did not the Franciscan movement begin with Francis hearing the Lord’s command at St Damaso in Assisi to go and rebuild his Church?”⁶³ So he did not think that what he believed in, and what he had devoted his scholarship to understanding and to communicating, was altogether lost, and neither do I.

¹ D.G. Rowell, ‘For what we have received’, *Modern Believing: Church and Society*, 51 (2010), p. 12.

² Letter to *The Times*, 29 July 2015.

³ D.G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians. A Study of the Nineteenth Century Theological Contrroversies concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), pp.98 & 220.

⁴ M. Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

⁵ J.H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864; Oxford: OUP, 1964), p. 36.

⁶ Newman, *Apologia*; R.W. Church, *The Oxford Movement. Twelve Years: 1833-1845* (new edn., London: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Y. Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival. Studies in the Oxford Movement*

- (London: Longmans, 1925); W.O. Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (Cambridge: CUP, 1960); D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (London: Murray, 1966).
- ⁷ D.G. Rowell, *The Vision Glorious. Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), p. 20.
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