

What is Anglo-Catholicism?

1 Introduction

What would have immediately struck someone entering a generally recognized Anglo-Catholic church just after the Second World War, say in the mid-1950s? To anyone with a very limited knowledge of the Church of England, it would have seemed just like going into a Roman Catholic church of the day. Religious pictures would be on the walls or over the altar. There would be several statues, one or two of which might have been clothed, and in front of them, a cluster of candles would perhaps be burning. A crucifix would be found above the pulpit. There might also have been one over a prayer desk, which would have acted as a confessional, if there were not an actual confessional, Roman Catholic style. There would be Stations of the Cross around the walls. And the focal point of the church would have been the high altar, decked with many candles, behind which there might have been a giant reredos with statues of saints. Around the church there would be carefully tended side-altars. A lamp might be burning in one of them; those with special knowledge would be aware that it was the place where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. And a smell of incense may have pervaded the whole building, especially if the main Sunday service had just taken place.

At a quick glance around the church, all this and more would have immediately struck the visitor. And should he or she have been present at the most popular Sunday service, the conviction of being in a Roman Catholic church would have been even stronger as doubtless there would be three priests conducting the service, attired in richly coloured eucharistic vestments, accompanied by numerous servers. And, apart from the incense, there would much bowing and genuflecting, and perhaps the music would be plainsong. The epistle and gospel would not be read but sung accordingly. There would, however, be hymns that were

unmistakably Anglican. If the service started about 11 o'clock it might be concluded with the angelus, which consists of prayers said in honour of and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. And should the observer attend church in the evening, instead of evensong there would be the service of benediction and a public recitation of the rosary. There would be daily services, held early in the morning. On one day of the year, Corpus Christi, the Blessed Sacrament would perhaps be carried around the church, the floor strewn with flowers.

Such would have been a typical Anglo-Catholic church about thirty years ago and what the observer would have seen would have been fairly uniform amongst all Anglo-Catholic churches. Today, the position is both different and more complex. One can still find many Anglo-Catholic churches of the genre just described – churches which inside look like Roman Catholic churches of that period and where services held are also like those of the Roman Church of that period. But there are now probably more Anglo-Catholic churches which have modified their furnishings and, especially, their services to coincide once again with those of the Roman Catholic Church. The changes occurred after the Vatican Council of the 1960s and were in many cases towards simplicity of ritual and the clearing out of what was seen to be much decadent ecclesiastical furniture. Services veered towards what might simply be called a more Protestant position (see ch. 11.8). Many Anglo-Catholic clergy felt they must do likewise and this has led to much diversity of practice. Consequently today it has become far less easy to pick out Anglo-Catholic churches than once it used to be.

In terms of elaborate rituals it is often said that some Anglo-Catholic churches are more Roman than Rome – what goes on is a veritable paradise for ecclesiastical scene-shifters, Roman pattern! But, no matter the point of comparison, there would appear to be little difference between Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic places of worship and services, either at present or in the recent past, and this is precisely how some Anglo-Catholics want it, for it is the image they strive to create. So difficult has it been to distinguish between the churches that at various times Roman Catholic priests have had to instruct their more ignorant followers that they must not confuse the two and so find themselves worshipping in what is nothing more than an Anglican church. Some Anglo-Catholic churches have co-operated in this and placed on their notice-boards such words as 'This is not a Roman Catholic church.' Let it not be forgotten that Anglo-Catholic churches can be found up and down the English

countryside, in villages as well as in towns and cities, and, despite their internal appearance and the ritual of their services, they stand as an integral part of the parochial system of the Church of England.

2 A confusion of terms

Anglo-Catholicism has been traditionally associated with other names such as ritualism, the high church, the Oxford movement, and Tractarianism. It is necessary to see precisely what is being discussed and to differentiate the terms.

There is little difficulty in understanding what is meant by the Oxford movement. The movement is generally reckoned to have begun as a result of John Keble's famous assize sermon of 14 July 1833, in Oxford, when he called on the Established Church to assert its autonomy and to reject encroachments from the State by firmly opposing what might loosely be called Erastianism. The result was the immediate emergence of a group of academics and academically minded people, mainly based in Oxford, who set in motion an extraordinary revival in the Church of England. As it crystallized, it loudly proclaimed that the Church of England had a Catholic heritage and was therefore Catholic in essence. The revival rested on the fact that the Church of England was not just a Protestant church which had emerged at the time of the Reformation but was basically Catholic – part of the Catholic church – and had not cut itself off from its progenitor. It had reformed itself but had not radically changed its nature during those turbulent times. The early Fathers of the movement, John Keble himself (1792–1866), John Henry Newman (1801–90), and Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–82), constituted the initial triumvirate; in the early days, there were also secondary but prominent figures such as F. W. Faber (1814–63), R. H. Froude (1803–36), Charles Marriott (1811–58), and Isaac Williams (1802–65).

The immediate task which engulfed the Oxford Fathers was nothing more than an intellectual one, that of propagating and reasserting doctrines relating to the foundation and origins of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*. Keble's sermon had been prompted by Parliament's threat to close certain Anglican bishoprics in Ireland. The battle immediately became one of ideas. It had very little to do with ritual or worship. Theology, and in particular the theology of the church, was of prime importance. Once that battle was won, practical consequences in the matter of worship would follow. Although such externalities were not the immediate concern of the Fathers, in various small ways what was said

anticipated them. The early days of the Oxford movement were like a spring of water, which may have had various sources but which eventually gave rise to a mighty river. It brought life to a church that had lost its vitality and was sterile and moribund. When the revival came, it was from a most unexpected quarter, for, unlike the Methodist and Evangelical revivals, it sprang from theological reflection. The emphasis of the Oxford Fathers on theology was apparent, not least in the publication of the *Tracts for the Times*. They began to appear in 1833 and came to an end in 1845. In all they numbered ninety. Far from being penny tracts they were weighty and scholarly essays covering such subjects as apostolic succession, fasting, the work of the clergy, and the Thirty-nine Articles. It was the logic of the final tract, written by Newman himself, which made him see that he had no alternative but to withdraw from the Church of England. *Tract XC* was condemned by the university of Oxford, which challenged it and decided against the possibility of a Catholic interpretation of the Thirty-nine Articles (Knox 1933:363). At the very outset the *Tracts* created a great deal of opposition on account of their Catholic leanings. Critics saw that their fears were justified when Newman was received into the Church of Rome. For obvious reasons the name Tractarian applied to all those who accepted the doctrines of the *Tracts*.

But, if the followers of the Oxford movement were called Tractarians on account of the *Tracts*, is it correct to refer to them as being high church? The answer is both in the affirmative and in the negative. They were generally labelled high church and often thought of themselves as such. Anyone who attempts to show historically or theologically that the Church of England has a historical lineage which connects it directly with the Catholic church (and perhaps the Roman Catholic Church) can as a rule be called high church. Also, those who support ritualistic services are said to be high or high church. The problem, however, is that the term is not applied only to the Oxford movement and all that it stood for: its context is somewhat wider. This is because it has been used to describe certain theologians such as Richard Hooker (1554–1645) and Richard Bancroft (1544–1610) of the Elizabethan period, and the Caroline divines, such as William Laud (1573–1645) and Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626). These bishops and theologians were strongly opposed to the Puritan Reformers and their followers. They subscribed to a high doctrine of the church, seeing it as a divine institution, governed by an episcopate and being a true dispenser of those sacraments found in the early church. The Caroline divines also stressed the

Divine Right of Kings and under the reign of William III became known as 'non-jurors'. Thomas Ken (1637–1711), bishop of Bath and Wells, is often seen as a true forerunner of Anglo-Catholicism (see Kaye-Smith 1925, chapter 7, and, for a more detailed study, Legg 1914). Both the early high church Anglicans and the Tractarians were nicknamed high and dry: doctrine was what mattered above all else (see Crowther 1970:23ff.).

There can be no doubt that there is a connecting link between these old high church theologians and the Oxford Fathers, who looked upon them as being the true Anglican thinkers who stressed the Catholic nature of the Church of England. At the same time they did not support them on every issue. Compared with high-churchmen 'of the old sort', the Oxford Fathers were hesitant to accept, for example, the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. But, theologically, the basis of Anglican Catholicity is to be found amongst the Caroline divines, as one may see in the writings of the Oxford Fathers. In them may be seen the true heart of Anglicanism, if that is in part expressed as a form of church order in a Catholic mould.

One term associated with the Oxford movement from its early days was ritualism. It was often employed in a derogatory way. No one can deny that some early Tractarians soon became interested in ritual and hoped to introduce ceremonies and rites which up until then had been totally absent in the Church of England, or were to be found in the Prayer Book but which needed to be restored. It is not correct, however, to equate ritualism with Tractarianism, or to say that every ritualist would call himself high church, or vice versa. The position is not as simple as that. The founding Fathers were above all cautious in the matter of ritual, for fear of losing ground over secondary issues. Being rationally minded they wanted first and foremost to outline careful, well-argued, unassailable theological positions. They fully realized that with a deep concern for the sacraments, baptism, confession, and the eucharist they would have to deal with liturgical and ritual matters. But in the early days* the Fathers demanded little more than that public worship should be conducted reverently and in complete compliance with the rubrics of the 1662 Prayer Book. They were careful to observe the rule of law and were opposed to anything which indicated liturgical disorder or chaos, for clearly such states were contrary to the concept of Catholicism. Being by training and background intellectuals, and having varying degrees of aesthetic sensitivity, they wished to see the establishment of the beauty of worship within Anglican churches (which some cynics might suggest is

the worship of beauty). They visualized the parish church as a holy temple, not a common-or-garden meeting-house. As a result of many decades of neglect there had to be a great deal of tidying up of church buildings and an attitude of dignity and reverence inculcated in priests and people alike. In this way congregations could be made aware that they were worshipping in the House of God, a building set apart and held to be sacred.

Many changes did in fact take place in parish churches and in college chapels. Clergy started to wear cassocks and surplices; the latter were directed in the rubrics of the Prayer Book. Indeed, what the Tractarians wanted above all else was to restore the Prayer Book and all its rubrics and instructions, which had been greatly overlooked. One example was the saying of matins and evensong daily by the clergy. Another outcome was that tidiness and cleanliness began to make their presence felt and much rubbishy furniture was thrown out. Box pews were changed for seats or lower backed pews facing the altar. Such changes were intended to allow the worshipper to see what was going on in the chancel and at the altar. The altar itself was given prominence: it was not just a domestic table which happened to be used occasionally for religious purposes. Music was introduced or improved. Hymns were sung. Gradually candles were introduced. Religious pictures were put on the walls. Even a cross was placed on the altar.

Clergy who tended to move in this direction were frequently called ritualists. Not surprisingly, amongst the population at large, and indeed amongst other clergy, it was changes in ceremonial rather than a renewal of doctrinal assertions that drew criticism and hostility, as well as enthusiasm. As the changes became rather more obvious, as ceremonial appeared to be increasing, fears arose about the Church of England being led towards the terrible Roman Catholic Church and about certain clergy being traitors within, who would deliver their church into the hands of the pope. From the 1870s up until the time of the First World War, and indeed at odd times after it, court cases emerged, some of them brought by Protestant groups within the Church of England and some by bishops, in which clergy were accused of ecclesiastical offences. The accused were castigated as ritualists and the term applied not only to those who were looked upon as being extreme but also to others who in a quiet and inoffensive way tried to make worship more reverent, more beautiful, and richer in symbolic content. There can be no doubt that such changes in worship had their origin in the Oxford movement (see pp. 25–30). As Judith Pinnington has correctly said:

‘Ritualism may not have been the logical, or even originally the consciously intended, outcome of Tractarianism, but it was both spiritually and sociologically inevitable’ (Pinnington 1983:97).

The movement towards more solemn and dignified forms of worship spread quickly. This affected the services of morning and evening prayer – the main services of the Church of England at the time – and holy communion, which was usually celebrated only a few times a year. Some clergy were keen to make changes in the services but did not necessarily accept all or many of the doctrines, such as apostolic succession, which were propagated by the Oxford Fathers. Thus, ritualism strictly referred to a wider movement than that contained within the Oxford movement and did not necessarily involve those who wanted to be identified with it. Nevertheless, the influence of the ritualistic component of the Oxford movement has been enormous in bringing about a revolutionary change in the practical conduct of worship in the Church of England (see ch. 5.3). In the end virtually every parish church in the land was influenced by ritualism. However, it must not be forgotten that the word ritualist was frequently used to describe Tractarians, and more particularly Anglo-Catholics, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and up until the time of the First World War. Anglo-Catholics did not use the word to describe themselves: it was a term of reproach employed by others.

The term sacramentalist was also used in connection with the Oxford movement in its early days. Quite simply it meant someone who emphasized the sacraments of the church. In practice it was a synonym for Tractarian or ritualist but was not much used after the turn of the century.

Anglo-Catholics certainly, and doubtless Tractarians as well, did not like to be called ritualists because the term implied that all they were interested in was ritual itself. Most Anglo-Catholic priests felt that they were being maligned when the term was applied to them. They were not concerned with ritual for its own sake but with ritual as the action component of the Catholic faith. On the contrary, they felt that it was wishy-washy, middle-of-the-road Anglicans who introduced ceremonies and rituals just for the sake of them – to make their churches ‘pretty’, colourful, or more interesting. That was mere idolatry! Ritual is of no value and a vain thing if it is not based upon sound doctrine. What must always come first – what has always been the essence of Catholicism – is truth, truth about God, Jesus Christ, and the church. Once these intellectual propositions, enshrined in the creeds, are accepted, then Catholic rituals will have their true

place and meaning. Such a rational approach, it might be argued, was not accepted by all Anglo-Catholics and many of the laity and clergy showed themselves in fact to be more interested in expressions of ritual than in the expositions of their faith beyond simplistic statements (but see ch. 3).

Anglo-Catholic is a term usually associated with the Oxford movement. For some people the two names are interchangeable. But to make them so is inaccurate. What is implied by Anglo-Catholicism is not the same as what is meant by the Oxford movement or Tractarianism. For example, there have been and still are those who would call themselves followers of the Oxford movement but who would repudiate the suggestion that they were Anglo-Catholics. Anglo-Catholic, however, was a name which was quickly applied to the Oxford movement for a number of reasons. For one thing the Oxford Fathers began the publication the *Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology*, which appeared in 1841 as a series of theological works written by seventeenth-century Anglican divines, including those whose names were mentioned earlier. The term was also given to devotees of the Oxford movement a little earlier, in 1838. The Latin term, *Anglo-Catholicus*, is said to have been used on one or two occasions in the seventeenth century (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). Certain ideas and ideals began to emerge in the Oxford movement which were scarcely perceptible when it began. Some of these were labelled extreme, in that they approximated to corresponding components of the Roman Catholic Church. Those who held such views began to be known as Anglo-Catholics. Anglo-Catholicism thus became a movement within a movement, or a more extreme wing of a movement, advocating advanced or Catholic practices and ideas which many thought were quite alien to the tradition of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*. It can be argued that Anglo-Catholics wanted to take the Oxford movement into fields which the Fathers were reluctant to enter, either because of a principle or because, on grounds of expediency, it was felt that the time was not ripe. Anglo-Catholics never repudiated any of the positions adopted by the Tractarians but they felt that the Fathers had not developed their initial theological advance. It is not surprising, therefore, that some have called Anglo-Catholicism 'the second stage' of the Catholic revival or the Oxford movement. If Tractarians were lambasted by Protestants for being Romanizers, then Anglo-Catholics were Romanizers *par excellence*.

E. A. Knox clearly differentiated Tractarianism from Anglo-Catholicism. As a firm upholder of the Protestant ethos of the

Church of England, he staunchly rejected ritualism and ceremonialism. He wrote: 'we acknowledge unhesitatingly that the Tractarian Revival was no mere re-awakening of ceremonialism, but entirely alien in its intention to the ceremonial development which claims parentage from it' (Knox 1933:377). The relation between the Oxford movement and Anglo-Catholicism might be seen to be that of mother and daughter. The daughter saw herself as originating from her mother yet having a distinct personality of her own. The mother realized that the daughter was in some measure an extension of herself. Because of the closeness of the bond, each was loyal to the other. The daughter fully realized and never repudiated the debt she owed to her mother: the mother was always loyal to the daughter and ready to protect her in the face of criticism and hostility. Despite disagreement between mother and daughter, external threats quickly brought about a closing of ranks.

Useful though such an analogy is, it is nevertheless not easy to differentiate Anglo-Catholicism clearly from the Oxford movement; and there are a number of reasons for this. As has just been said, neither the Oxford movement nor Anglo-Catholicism has ever been anything more than a movement within a church, and an Established Church at that. Membership of the movements has been by way of personal loyalty and identity, by self-declared allegiance. There has never been an official organization which has embraced entirely either or both movements. Membership cards are completely unknown and indeed are held to be undesirable. In this respect a contrast might be made with membership of a trade union or the Methodist Church; it is well known that the organization of the first was to a large extent based on that of the second. Generally speaking, one is a member of such groups or one is not, and, while even in these cases the boundaries may at times be fuzzy, they are relatively clear-cut compared with those which might be used to designate followers of the Oxford movement and Anglo-Catholicism.

Another problem is to differentiate Tractarians from Anglo-Catholics within the general high-church movement. The reason is quite simply that the boundaries between the two groups are extraordinarily vague. They are really best seen as resting on a continuum along which it is very difficult to draw a line, on one side of which is Tractarianism and on the other Anglo-Catholicism. To put it crudely, Anglo-Catholics are one degree further on than Tractarians. But precisely what that one degree consists of is not in itself very clear. What is meant by Anglo-Catholic has to be deduced from the general usage of the term.