

THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL AND THE OXFORD MOVEMENT.

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THE year 1933 marks the centenary of the Oxford Movement. The famous Assize Sermon on National Apostasy was preached by John Keble on July 14, 1833. In the previous April John Henry Newman and Richard Hurrell Froude had paid a visit to Rome and interviewed Monseigneur (afterwards Cardinal) Wiseman on two occasions. The object of these interviews is stated by William Palmer, and corroborated more vigorously by Froude, as being "To ascertain the terms on which they could be admitted to Communion by the Roman Church." Newman takes no notice of this contemporary evidence in his *Apologia*. He there dismisses the incident by simply declaring "Froude and I made two calls upon Monseigneur (now Cardinal) Wiseman at the Collegio Inglese, shortly before we left Rome." (*History of my Religious Opinions*, p. 33, Longmans, 1865.—This book will, for convenience, be called simply Newman in further references.) The omission is remarkable when the prefatory matter (XII—XXI) is carefully considered. But it is not the purpose of this article to cover the history of the Oxford Movement. The incident is recorded as a suitable starting-point for considering the relation between the Oxford Movement and the antecedent Evangelical Revival. Certain coincidences strike the observer. Both movements originated in a University and in the same University of Oxford. Both movements began with a close corporation of earnest men. Both of them, originally, looked for a definite movement of God through the agency of the existing Church of England. Both of them ended, in large measure, by a repudiation of the existing standards of the Church of England. Wesley had the courage to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles. The modern so-called Anglo-Catholic is striving to abolish them.

With a fairly close coincidence in the period of the century in which each movement opened (1730—1833) and the superficial resemblances indicated above it would be a comparatively easy matter to find grounds for combining the celebration of the two movements. Already voices are raised declaring that the Oxford Movement was "the completion" of the Evangelical Revival. But something besides dates and superficial resemblances fall to be considered.

After the Revolution of 1688—90 a Toleration movement began in England. This Toleration movement rapidly grew into a distrust of "enthusiasm" and "superstition." Hostility to the Church was openly avowed. Deism exalted Natural Religion at the expense of Revelation. Notwithstanding earnest disavowals of the principles of Deism the religious life of the country became

permeated with a type of doctrine that reflected something of its leaning to the Natural rather than the Revealed elements of Christianity. The famous definition of religion as "morality touched with emotion" most nearly expresses this type. The emotion, further, is only permitted to express itself in rhetoric on a purely conventional basis of "style." "Broad Churchism," or, as it was then known, "Low Churchism," was the creed of the dominant party. Its exponents boasted that they regulated their lives by "the cold light of reason." Burnet, in his *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1699), is an example of the "Low Church" attitude. In his preface he hazards the conjecture that an opinion which neither "has any influence on practice, or any part either of public worship or of secret devotion," may be left to the freedom of the individual's thought. There was a distrust of so-called "speculative beliefs." Interest professed to centre on moral considerations. A strange anomaly resulted. Morals declined at the very time that emphasis was laid upon them. The driving force behind moral conduct had been seriously impaired. ἡ διάνοια οὐδέν κινεῖ "The understanding moves nothing," said Aristotle. The colour, the joy and consequently the re-action had gone out of religion. In such an environment the Evangelical Revival was born. No movement can divest itself of its environment. The suggestion is, at bottom, a contradiction in terms. It would be a movement of nothing towards nothing. That is, perhaps, the whole of the truth lying behind the earnest injunction to be abreast of the times.

The Evangelical Revival brought to a word-weary people a new motive power. It revived the truly practical which had been largely discarded as speculative. It spoke again of sin, redemption, regeneration, justification and sanctification. But it spoke of these things as realities in personal experience. That came as a great shock to the orthodox and unorthodox alike. Butler, of *Analogy* fame, sought to persuade Wesley not to preach in his diocese. Bernard, his modern commentator, with a not dissimilar outlook, says he dreaded extravagance and emotionalism. Whitefield, with his amazing histrionic gifts, would have startled Butler even more. The unorthodox found all the old bogies, that they had securely laid to rest, rising again. Revelation, despite the disadvantage that it did not happen to be written on the sky, gripped the imaginations of men. God spoke to souls. Redemption clothed itself in the garments of an actual suffering of the Son of God on behalf of actual sinners, the actual sinners listening to the message. Regeneration became a positive work of the Holy Ghost experienced in the daily lives of multitudes. Justification was the actual acceptance for Christ's sake of an individual, concrete sinner in this or that village. Sanctification was a living process, operative in living hearts. The speculative had become practical with a vengeance. Proclamation took the place of Apologetics. Aggression supplanted a cautious defence. No doubt there was extravagance. But was there no extravagance in such works as Warburton's *Divine Legation*

of *Moses* or Paley's *Moral Theology*? Yes. Extravagance in argument maybe, but no "enthusiasm." It was loudness, and forcible expression, in the new movement, that disturbed the measured calm of these dispassionate disputants. They were earnest also in the pursuit of truth, but they had caught the spirit of their opponents. They forgot, too readily, that a stately diction may conceal a real poverty of thought and that soulless indifference lay close to dispassionateness. They met the new advocacy in a spirit of cold, almost sullen, aloofness. Witness, for example, Bishop Douglas's contemptuous dismissal of the "enthusiasts." He cites passages from Wesley's *Journal* believing that he was preserving interesting relics of a passing fanaticism that would otherwise be lost. The fate he anticipated for Wesley has descended on himself. Few now trouble to study *The Criterion*, although it repays study. Thus the orthodox and the unorthodox joined in deprecating "enthusiasm." It must be borne in mind, in their defence, that the word was employed in its old sense of "God-intoxicated." The charge came from men who had experienced the later movements amongst the Friends and had learned from their fathers of Fifth-Monarchy men and others. Resistance to the established order of Church and State, under the plea of conscience, was to them a barely conceivable flight of an ill-regulated imagination. The crowds, the tumult, the insistence on an immediate inner experience, offered at least superficial resemblance to the "enthusiasts" of the past, and there were not wanting individual instances of excess to confirm the impression thus created.

It may be asked, To what did the Evangelicals run counter? The theory of the Atonement that found most acceptance is well expressed by Butler: Our Lord Jesus Christ "obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life" (*Analogy*, Pt. II, C. 5). Butler understands by repentance "behaving well for the future" (*ibid.*). Butler was striving to erect a barrier against naturalism. Others employed his barrier as a platform. Revelation, attested by miracles, established by Divine Authority, assumed, in their hands, the character of a text-book of virtuous living. Having "been put into a capacity of salvation" by the death of Christ, we are enabled to cultivate that capacity by continual reference to God's requirements as laid down in Holy Scripture. So much depended on this cultivation it was inexpedient for anyone to venture unaided on a survey of the wide field of revelation. The Christian Church is amongst other things "an instituted method of instruction." It is the wisdom of men to imbibe the instruction it affords and submit to its deductions from Scripture. Thus emerged the idea, since made popular under the ambiguous phrase, "The Church to teach and the Bible to prove." Under the influence of concepts such as these Archbishop Magee looked with anxiety on the work of the Bible Society. According to Newman, Archbishop Whately shared this opinion. Guided by these principles Newman withdrew his name from the Oxford Association of the Bible Society. It is also, perhaps, characteristic

of him that he did not do so at once (Newman, p. 10). It is from this school, flippantly dubbed "the high-and-dry school" (the phrase is borrowed from Newman), that much of the mechanical theories of inspiration, usually attributed to Evangelicals, have come.

The Evangelical Party, in turn, became affected by the opposition that thus slowly hardened against it. Coming into an age with much talk of virtuous living and little moral power, it occupied itself with preaching a living faith in a living Saviour. In this way it recovered much of Apostolic fervour and revived much of the essential teaching of the Reformers. But, if it may be so expressed, it recovered those qualities after a piecemeal fashion. Many of the Evangelicals had a living faith but had not formulated a consistent creed. The dry powerless orthodoxy of a Church that was generally hostile to their aspirations, repelled them. They began to lay more and more stress on Conversion and less and less stress on Church Order. The "Holy Club" began with a spiritual conception similar to the famous "Whole Duty of Man"—Christ took off from the hardness of the Law given to Adam and requires of us only an honest and hearty endeavour to do what we are able, and where we fail, accepting of sincere repentance (Preface, sec. 21). Wesley substituted "Evangelical Arminianism," with its insistence on living faith, for this doctrine, but never formulated a real creed. His revision of the Articles displays a disregard of antiquity. He omits all reference to the Three Creeds as well as dispensing with the Articles on Church Authority and General Councils. Wesley was modern, with an acute perception of immediate needs. He cared little for formal presentation except in so far as it had direct bearing on the needs he felt. The unhappy conflict with the Establishment; the exclusion of Methodists from Communion in certain parish churches; the problem of meeting the urgent need for lay preachers; a host of combining circumstances drove the Methodists beyond the Church borders to develop a separate spiritual life of their own.

Meanwhile, Evangelicals remained in the Church of England. Also an Evangelical movement, for ever associated with the name of Thomas Chalmers, reinvigorated the Church of Scotland. Cowper became the poet, as Newton became the prophet, of English Evangelical Churchmanship. Here also the practical present need of souls and bodies formed the dominant idea. The early Church Evangelicals, for the most part, accepted the tenets of Calvinism, but speedily abandoned, as a body, any serious attempt at theological formulation. There are exceptions, of which Simeon is one. Later years have given English theological thought such writers as Dean Goode and Nathaniel Dimock. The Evangelicals were loyal to the Church of England, accepted her formularies, and through them imbibed much of the spirit of the Reformation. But while they were ready to praise the Reformation in the abstract and tenaciously held to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, they were not, as a body, remarkable for a study of its formulations

in the concrete. They were largely indifferent to the claim to continuity in dogma, and, indeed, in process of time, while strong Biblicists, were, so far as Bible study permitted, undogmatic. Newman could say, "It had no intellectual basis; no internal idea, no principle of unity, no theology" (Newman, p. 102). The criticism, like all Newman's criticisms, never penetrates beyond the surface. But, at the surface, it holds its measure of truth. The Universities were not Evangelical, and Evangelicals who attained to eminence in the Church only too frequently incorporated judgments and opinions of an alien character into their original creed. In 1833, and previous to that, Evangelicalism as a doctrine had become diluted and survived more effectively as a mode of action. How far all this resulted from the philosophy of the eighteenth century would open up a most interesting enquiry. Newman could write in 1839:

"In the present day mistiness is the mother of wisdom. A man who can set down a half-a-dozen general propositions, which escape from destroying one another only by being diluted into truisms, who can hold the balance between opposites so skilfully as to do without fulcrum or beam, who never enunciates a truth without guarding himself against being supposed to exclude the contradictory—who holds that Scripture is the only authority, yet that the Church is to be deferred to, that faith only justifies, yet that it does not justify without works, that grace does not depend on the Sacraments, yet is not given without them, that bishops are a divine ordinance, yet those who have them not are in the same religious condition as those who have—this is your safe man, and the hope of the Church; this is what the Church is said to want, not party men, but sensible, temperate, sober, well-judging persons, to guide it through the channel of no-meaning, between the Scylla and Charybdis of Aye and No" (Newman, pp. 102-3).

Incidentally it may be observed that there is not lacking evidence of this singular feature in Newman himself. He errs in definition frequently, and by careless definition involves himself in the Fallacy of Accident. Indeed, if Newman wanted a confirmation of the prevalence of mistiness, the amazing success of the *Apologia* might have furnished it. In his assault on Liberalism Newman assures us that he abjured and denounced the proposition, "No one can believe what he does not understand." Obviously the argument depends on the meaning attaching to the word "understand." On one interpretation the proposition condemned is almost a truism. On another interpretation it would exclude belief in anything, as we do not fully understand anything. Newman opposed the proposition as stated, believing it excluded mysteries of religion. An examination of the paragraph quoted from Newman reveals the fact that the contradictions which he instances are argumentative exaggerations conceived in a petulant spirit. No sane person consciously retains contradictory premises. But lack of precision in definition creates apparent contradictions and frequently an oscillation of mind between two positions, both of which are seen to contain truth and yet cannot be co-ordinated. At the limits of knowledge this attitude may even be inevitable, but it is frequently created through loose formulation of opinions. It is impossible for the holder of any collection of belief to be, in

the strict sense of the word, undogmatic. But it is possible that the exponents of strong and genuine convictions might be, again in the strict sense of the word—incoherent. The Oxford Movement is the outcome of incoherence. The Whigs were in power. The Church had done violence to the cherished opinions of the Whigs. Evangelical Nonconformity had arisen and been greatly strengthened by the expelled or seceding Methodists. The old dream of a truly National Church had once more been rudely dispelled. Repressive measures against Dissenters had been repealed. The franchise had been enlarged. It is one of the ironies of history that Gladstone, the political star of Anglo-Catholicism, achieved fame as a political Liberal and retained his power largely through the aid of Dissenters. It is, perhaps, not so surprising that he disestablished the Irish Church. Hurrell Froude might have stood for general Disestablishment. It is more probable that he desired the complete subordination of the State to the Church. It is one of the humours of the situation that "the advanced party" was advocating a return to the Middle Ages. To the excited imagination of Keble the suppression of ten Irish bishoprics marked the prelude to Disruption and Disintegration. He called it "National Apostasy."

To anyone even slightly acquainted with the chequered story of the Episcopate in its relation to States, Keble's sermon appears as a delirium. But the enthusiasts who gathered round Keble recked little of history. The curious policy of leaping from the sixth to the sixteenth century which is still in favour in many theological colleges, hid much from their eyes. They could have gathered much even from the earlier period, but it was not the habit to do so. The modern critical examination of history was yet in its infancy and would have been regarded, most probably, as yet another instance of devastating Liberalism. Newman asked, "But is Dr. Arnold a Christian?" He meant, he tells us, who is to guarantee Dr. Arnold's interpretation? (Newman, p. 34). Though the reference is to an Old Testament problem it is indicative of an attitude of mind.

It needs to be borne in mind that however much Evangelicals may be to blame for the general inconsequence in theology, or however much they may have been infected by it, the original development of Tractarianism took course outside their borders. It has never succeeded in quenching completely the historic antagonistic tradition which is still the heritage of the Evangelical School. The pen-portraits of Newman confirm this judgment. Hurrell Froude was "a high Tory of the Cavalier stamp, and was disgusted with the Toryism of the opponents of the Reform Bill. . . . He professed openly his admiration of the Church of Rome, and his hatred of the Reformers" (Newman, pp. 25-4). Newman himself in 1833 "thought little of the Evangelicals as a class. (He) thought they played into the hands of the Liberals" (p. 31). Palmer, "the only really learned man" among them, and whom they failed to retain, had connection with "the high-and-dry school" (p. 40). Hugh Rose was a pronounced High Churchman, but his guidance was

soon disregarded. Keble was shy of Newman for years in consequence of the marks of the evangelical and liberal schools upon him (p. 18). Pusey came later. There is not one person profoundly influenced by Evangelical thought in the movement. Newman claims to have held Calvinistic opinions, but the depth of his early convictions may be gauged by his naïve remark that the doctrine of final perseverance meant that "The inward conversion of which I was conscious . . . would last into the next life, and that I was elected to eternal glory." Quite good for a boy of fifteen, but also quite like a boy of fifteen. The convert to Calvinism in 1816 became at the same time a convert to perpetual celibacy. Also he was very superstitious and used to cross himself on going into the dark. At any rate by 1822 Newman had moved from inchoate Evangelicalism and become an inchoate Liberal. As if to complete the perplexity, he emerges as a Liberal with a strong belief in Apostolical Succession and a growing reverence for Tradition (Newman, pp. 8-14). Hurrell Froude appears to have won him to Tractarianism. It is not usual to find opponents of a religious system completing it in any other sense than finishing it. From the outset it was the aim of Tractarianism to finish Evangelical Christianity. Newman made a bid to capture Evangelical support and failed. The Editor of *The Record* early perceived the drift of his letters on "Church Reform" and ended the series. Newman and Froude secured "personal influence and congeniality of thought" by breaking even with Palmer and Rose. The Liberalism against which Pusey fulminated obtained a footing within the ranks of the Tractarian successors through the influence of Gore. Ritualism has attracted some who are otherwise more remote from the original motives of the Party than the most pronounced Evangelical. The "mistiness" which Newman at once condemned and exemplified has taken a permanent hold on the new disciples of the Oxford Movement. They cling to the "Via Media" which Newman abandoned. Each member seems to find the middle way just where his fancy places it. The "safe men" all echo something of the party shibboleths. Yet as *The Church Times* plaintively declared, no voice in the recent Parliamentary Debates on the Prayer Book actually defended Anglo-Catholicism as the Tractarians conceived it. Evangelicals alone, untouched by the early manifestations, remain untouched still. There is an essential antagonism between the two systems of thought. It is impossible to fuse them. Where one flourishes the other perishes. The genius of the Oxford Movement did not lie in brightening Church Services. It is an insult to the memory of Keble, Newman and Pusey to suggest such an issue to their labours. It did not lie in Church Reform in the sense of correcting incidental abuses. No doubt, like others, individual members contributed something to these results, but as a movement it held aloof. It did not lie in great Home evangelistic or philanthropic efforts, nor yet in a devoted Foreign Mission programme. In so far as these matters express Christian sentiment in action the members of the Tractarian Party could not be wholly insensible

to their appeal. Yet it would be difficult to instance names like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, leaders of Christian humanitarianism, among the more stalwart promoters of the new ideas.

The standing institutions of the Church of England point this moral. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in great measure absorbed any missionary spirit existing in the Anglo-Catholic ranks. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge offered an outlet for home activities. Neither of these were original enterprises, and neither of them, even to-day, can be said to be a complete expression of the ideals of the Oxford Movement. And yet when the Movement started the distraction of a protracted war troubled England no longer. There were grave problems connected with the rapid rise of the population and the alienation of masses of men from the Church, and indeed from all Christian principles. Evangelicals built Churches, started Mission Halls and Mission Societies. The little coterie in Oxford took another line. They sought to magnify the office of the ministry; to restrict grace to the Episcopal system of Church government; to dilute the Reformation principles by a new and unconvincing interpretation of the Articles and Prayer Book; to introduce a system of Church discipline that would make the parish priest an autocrat; to widen the breach between Protestant Communion and the Church of England; to secure, if possible, re-union with Rome; to substitute Church teaching for general Bible reading; to restrict to the Bishops, with the possible assent of the other clergy, all movements of spiritual reform and development; to repudiate the right of private judgment and substitute sacramental infusion of grace for the doctrine of Justification by faith; to check all free enquiry and compel the scholar to submit his findings to the assumed deliverances of the Church Catholic; to approximate the services of the Church of England to those of the Church of Rome; to create afresh the condition of a teaching clergy and a hearing laity who dare not oppose the voice of the existing Church under pain of National Apostasy. This is what Newman meant by securing theological unity. This is what Froude regarded as the true Theocratic system. Their aims were never realised. They have broken on the rock of Liberalism which they set out to blast. They have failed to reduce to impotence the Evangelical message which still proclaims a freer and a purer creed. But they have weakened the witness of the Church of England. They have diverted the zeal of many to externals which cannot finally profit. They have stereotyped division and patronised disregard to solemn obligations. They have not completed the Evangelical Revival. Thank God, they have not finished it. To join in commendation of retrogression is to clog the wheels of progress. Rather let Evangelicals take to heart the lesson of the past and build more securely even if it means that they appear to advance more slowly, until the Church recovers her lost power and rids herself of those humours which have their origin in a disordered constitution.