

CHAPTER I

The Method of Revival

In the long history of the Church the revival of religion has taken many different forms, but never so simple a form as that adopted by the Oxford leaders in 1833. They had the audacity to ask bishops, priests and laypeople to be consistent with the teaching of their own Church. It seemed a very poor method compared with other great revivals that had gone before. It was quite unlike that of John Wesley with its open-air preachings, its boisterous demonstrations, and thrills of conversion. To tell people simply to believe what they profess and to practise what they believe appears to be the most trite of counsels. Yet when all is said, that is the root of the matter in a Christian country in which habit and custom may have made religion dull and flat. All religious revivals, if they do not begin there, reach that simple plea for consistency sooner or later.

In England the relation between Church and nation was a curiously intimate one at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The belief was that an Englishman *quâ* Englishman was a member of the Church of England. The national Church

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existed to do certain things for him, mainly to baptise, marry and bury, and conduct services for his edification when he felt inclined to attend them. The Church of England was in fact an ethical adjunct of the nation; its chief officers, the bishops, were appointed by the Crown, the stipends of the clergy bore a sinister resemblance to taxes since, like them, they were collected under processes of strict law, its ministrations of Baptism, Marriage and Burial were recorded in State forms, its Book of Common Prayer was the book annexed to an Act of Parliament. Nation and Church, Englishman and Churchman, birth and Baptism were names for the same things.

Out of this strange mixture of the national and religious, Keble, Newman and Pusey evoked a revival of religion so remarkable, that in thirty years it not only awoke the Church to a sense of its Divine mission and compelled the nation to recognise it, but also moved to a new life of passionate devotion and social service multitudes of people who before had treated God as a pious hypothesis and their neighbours as those with whom they had nothing to do.

How did these men achieve this miracle? To begin with; they took the situation as it was. In effect they said,

“The people of England belong to the Church of England, they acknowledge the vogue if not the

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PRAYER BOOK QUESTIONS

authority of the Book of Common Prayer. Well then, what has this Book to say about the Church? Does it regard the Church as a department of the State which the government of the day can use according to its convenience? Does this Book say that a bishop's chief function is to sit and talk in the House of Lords? Does the Book lay down that Communion once in three months or even once a month is sufficient? Does the Book say that a priest's office is a career, like the legal or medical profession, for making a livelihood? Does the Book permit churches to be shut up in gloomy silence all the week? What is the mind of the Book upon the ministry? What, according to the Book, are Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Let us be clear", said the Tractarians, "about membership in the Church of England, let us draw into the light of day not what we think about the Church but what the Church's Book has to say about itself and about us who claim to belong to it. Then the next step will follow. Are the truths enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer Catholic or Protestant? That is to say, have they always been the teaching of the Church or were they taken out of the Bible for the first time in the sixteenth century at the Reformation? Was there a period in history when the ministry was not threefold, a ministry of bishops, priests and deacons? When was the Holy Eucharist not celebrated every Sunday? Were the clergy, when the storms of the early persecutions ceased, expected never to be seen in their churches except on Sundays?

Then comes the further question. Is Church teaching as contained in the Book of Common Prayer really true in the sense that it is compatible with the mind of Christ and in agreement with Apostolic teaching so

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far as we can understand it from the pages of those books of the New Testament which have been preserved through the pious care of the Church”.

Such questions as these came straight out of the Prayer Book considered as a handbook of the Christian faith. But there were others more practical and more concerned with the laity. For the Prayer Book is more a volume of praise and prayer, of sacramental rites and devotions, than a manual of Christian doctrine. Its main purpose is to bring men and women before the throne of grace and unite them in living, loving, confident communion with God through Christ. The Prayer Book taught the Tractarians to put religion before theology. It was to bring men to God that the Oxford leaders exalted the Holy Eucharist and taught the doctrine of the Real Presence. It was faith in Christ that caused them to repudiate the idea that Baptism could be no more than a pious and edifying ceremony. It was to make repentance deep and absolution a real remission of sin that Keble and Pusey revived the Prayer Book practice of private confession.

When the Movement began to work in village and town churches outside Oxford, other questions arose in the mind of every parish priest, “How am I to conduct this or that service? What dress am I to use in celebrating the Eucharist? What furnishings are needed for the Altar? What symbols of the

RITUAL AND SOCIAL REFORM

Christian religion may I set up in the Church?" The Church's Book gave little guidance on such relatively minor matters as these. Catholic tradition and practice must be the guide, checked, if need be, by St Paul's requirements that worship should be beautiful, orderly, edifying, intelligent and spiritual. In shallow minds these matters of ritual and ceremonial might be exaggerated out of all proportion to their worth, but the true successors of Keble and Pusey employed the externals of worship with the single aim of setting forth the glory of God and so helping souls to enter into communion with Him.

It is a gross misrepresentation of the Oxford Movement to describe it as preoccupied with matters which are belittled or despised under the opprobrious title of "ecclesiastical". Its leaders never forgot that the royal law has two sides, and if they were profoundly concerned with the things of God, they were no less deeply interested in the welfare of their neighbour. No men of their time, not even Maurice or Kingsley, toiled more unweariedly for the poor and oppressed than the early Tractarians. Nor did any social reformers work harder in the cause of ill-paid and over-worked wage earners than their successors Canon Scott Holland, Bishop Gore, Father Stanton and Studdert Kennedy. It is worth noting here that the Social Service Board of the Scottish Church is

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at the present time responsible for two social undertakings which were the direct result of the Catholic revival in Scotland, the one a Home in Dundee founded sixty years ago by Bishop Forbes and the other a Rescue Home in Edinburgh carried on successfully by a Sisterhood which was founded as early as 1858.

The Oxford Movement began by appealing to scholars in Oxford and to men and women of culture elsewhere. But Pusey, for the church he built in 1845 at his own expense, chose not Mayfair, but a parish in Leeds with an Irish quarter living under appalling social conditions and ravaged in 1847 first by Irish fever and then by cholera. Ever since that time the heroes of the work of the Church among the masses of the people have been men like Prynne of Plymouth, Lowder of St Peter's, London Docks, Mackonochie and Stanton of St Alban's, Holborn, and Dolling of Portsmouth, all of whom drew their inspiration from the teaching of the Oxford leaders.

It must be confessed that in the work of missions overseas the influence of the Catholic revival was for a time much weaker, though Keble was an intimate friend of Bishop Gray of Capetown. But one by one the Universities' Mission to East Africa, the Oxford Mission to Calcutta, the Cowley Fathers' missions in India and Kaffraria provided fields for the missionary enthusiasm of the Movement.

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A MOVEMENT NOT AN EVENT

Such was the way in which, from simple questions about the Church's profession, Creed, and practice, the Catholic revival awoke the clergy and impressed the people, brought interest and reality into worship, fanned the flame of missionary zeal both at home and abroad, and established institutions for the redress of social wrongs. Such a revival in its very nature is not an event but a movement which, once begun, cannot be said to end, for it is simply the work of the faithful seeking to make and keep the Church consistent with its own Creed and loyal to its own Master.

Did the great struggle which began in 1833 end in victory? If Keble were alive to-day he would see practically everything, for which he and his friends contended, firmly established in every part of the Anglican communion, and the larger part of his teaching regarded as incontrovertible. But if anyone ventured even to whisper the word victory his rebuke would be sure, "There is no victory for the Church militant. When Christians speak of victory they are sighing for a false peace and need the blast of a trumpet sounding a new advance".

There are not wanting to-day signs which suggest that the flame of enthusiasm which was kindled by the Oxford leaders has begun to die down. The catastrophe of the war was the death-blow of the Romantic movement in which the Catholic revival was born. We live in an age not of

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romance but of pessimism and disillusionment, when religion may once again become a dead habit or be taken merely for a useful adjunct to social life. A new revival will then be necessary. Its methods may differ greatly from that carried on by the great succession of Churchmen, from Keble on through Forbes and Mackonochie to Church, Liddon, Gore, Scott Holland and Studdert Kennedy. But its fundamental principles will be the same, consistency in truth, in devotion and in life.

CHAPTER II

The First Stage

1833—1845

Spiritual movements within the Church are quickly forgotten; just because they are spiritual they find little or no mention in popular histories, which deal with crude facts and with human beings only in so far as these are linked with striking events.

Thus it is not altogether surprising to learn that the Oxford Movement at the present time suggests to some minds nothing more than the movement recently carried over to this country by the American Lutheran minister, Dr Buchman, which is sometimes known by the name of the Oxford Group. But the Oxford Movement known to history began a hundred years ago not in America but in Oxford University with men who were priests of the Church of England. Its first promoters, John Keble, Hurrell Froude, John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Charles Marriott and Isaac Williams, were all Oxford men who had not only gained high academical distinction but had also occupied at least for some time official posts at the University. It was in Oxford that the Movement with almost Apostolic fervour sped to its first success. In Oxford it sustained its

THE FIRST STAGE

first defeat by the secession of Newman to Rome. From Oxford its disciples, after the bitter persecution which followed that disaster, were, like the first generation of Christians, “scattered abroad” carrying with them the seed of Catholic principle, not only to the great cities and country parishes of England, but also to Scotland and the colonies beyond the seas.

Primarily, the object was to save the Church of England from slavery to the State and from a deadening worldliness which had closed the eyes of its people to its own principles.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the condition of the Church of England was pitiable indeed. It was execrated in many parts of the country as the enemy of the people. To the Chartists and the champions of the Reform Bill, bishops were worldly potentates whose chief business was to support the political party that had appointed them and to vote in the House of Lords against every reasonable measure of political reform. Lord Grey, the Prime Minister, had peremptorily told the bishops to set their house in order, and the Bristol mob had shewn their opinion of their bishop by setting his palace on fire. No wonder that the Church was unpopular. Many of the clergy were non-resident.¹ Not a few

¹ Out of 10,800 benefices, 6311 were without resident incumbents.