

November 2, 2014: 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. - The Oxford Movement and Catholic Anglicanism

By: Pat Barton

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in thy sight, O Lord.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries the life of the Church of England was nearly brought to an end. This caused consternation, particularly among a group of young men in Oxford. They strongly wished to bring the church back to her ancient roots. Gladstone stated that it was these young men who brought about renewal in the church.

Their first leader was John Keble. Other notable men who joined them were John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey and Richard Froude. Keble gave a sermon in 1833 on National Apostasy, or abandonment of religious faith, and this led to a revival, encouraging loyalty to the great doctrines of our religion: Incarnation, Atonement, Baptism, and Holy Communion, all reinforced by restored faith in the Church of England as a vital part of the Holy Catholic Church.

This was the beginning of what is known as the Oxford Movement whose founders were concerned with the central truths of Religion, and Christian Life as lived in conformity with these truths.

They spread their views by writing and became known as the Tractarians, producing what were collectively known as 'Tracts for the Times' in which Clergy were encouraged to teach the full faith without doubt or hesitation. At first they were very

successful; there was a great revival wherever their influence spread.

Later, there arose opposition from Liberals, who feared these attitudes would widen the gap between the church and non-conformist sects with which the Church wished to unite. There was opposition also from Parliamentarians who felt that no limit should be imposed on the control of Parliament. The Tractarians believed that the Church must be ordained by Christ himself and this idea created the thought that Tractarian Doctrines were dangerous, tending towards Rome.

John Henry Newman lived for most of the 19th century. He had enrolled in Trinity College, Oxford, at the age of 15 and he stayed in Oxford for almost 30 years, moving first to Oriol College, then holding various posts in pastoral office.

He edited all the Tracts for the Times. He argued, in Tract 90, which he wrote in 1841, that the Thirty-Nine Articles did not necessarily conflict with Roman Catholic Doctrine. This caused an outcry which ended the series. He was prohibited from further preaching in Oxford and the Bishop forbade the writing of more Tracts.

A scheme for establishing a joint Lutheran and Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem seemed to Newman to be the last straw and he left the English Church, with a breaking heart, it was said at the time, and joined the Church in Rome, being received there in 1845 and ordained to the Priesthood the following year. In 1879 the Pope admitted him to the College of Cardinals. The Tractarian movement has ever since been blamed for the tendency toward

Rome but only one Tractarian seceded and most remained deeply loyal to the English Church.

The Oxford Movement added a conservative option to the lively atmosphere of Victorian Religious Debate. Victorians abhorred the Atheism of the Utilitarians, who followed the doctrine that the greatest happiness, of the greatest number, should be the guiding principle of behaviour. They also disliked the Agnosticism of the scientists, and were put off by the enthusiasm of the Evangelicals. They considered the Broad Church too latitudinarian, that is, tolerating free thought in religious matters, to have meaning left in its Doctrine, yet did not wish to go over to Rome. They found these High Church Anglicans a perfect solution, allowing, as they did, for more ritual and for religious decoration in the churches.

Arguably, the Oxford Movement ended in 1845 when Newman ceded to Rome but the impact has lasted to this day; for example, in St. John the Evangelist in Inglewood.

Some of the important issues were:

Weekly communion – not common at the time

Sacraments

Candles, vestments

Authority of Ordained Clergy

Episcopacy with direct apostolic succession by laying on of hands

Many decisions were made from the Ecclesiastical Courts to the Privy Council, a secular court answerable only to Parliament:

- the Priest should face the altar while celebrating Holy Communion
- vestments should be worn at Holy Communion
- there should be lights on the altar
- water should be mixed with the wine at Holy Communion
- unleavened, rather than ordinary household bread, should be used.

We now, as normal custom, have such things as flowers and candles on the altar; the choir wear gowns, sometimes with surplices; the choir walk in in twos; the choir receives communion before the rest of the congregation.

There were formerly riots over these situations.

After 1850 the Oxford Movement merged into the Anglo-Catholic Movement. We now call this High Church. These Anglicans, many associated with Oxford, argued for the re-instatement of lost Christian Traditions of Faith, and their inclusion into Anglican Litany and Theology.

One of the second generation of the Oxford Movement was Father Richard Meux Benson. He shared the hope that Monastic Life in the Anglican Communion might be revived. During the 1850's several Anglican Sisterhoods were successfully established but attempts to found Monastic Brotherhoods failed because the communities lacked any connection with the ordinary life of the Church of England.

Benson started an experimental community with two other priests at Cowley, in 1866. They took vows as Mission Priests of

the Society of St, John the Evangelist. Benson remained Vicar of Cowley for 20 more years and kept the Society anchored in the life of the Parish. When he resigned, in 1890, the Cowley Fathers as they were known, had missions in The United States, India and South Africa.

The Canadian Congregation of the Society of St. John the Evangelist was founded in 1927, in Bracebridge, Ontario. SSJE, as we usually call it, has a number of laymen who, from their homes, pray and work along with the Brothers. They are called Friends. David Parker is one of them and you will notice his SSJE Cross when he is Lay-Reader.

Our Priest, Christine, has made several Retreats and Studies with SSJE in the East.

Father Benson`s emphasis was on personal conversion and sanctification, springing from his dark view of the state of human society. He even included the Church in this view stating that it had fallen away from the true spiritual calling of conscious and habitual union with Christ.

At the time that the Anglican Church was being established in Canada and spreading to the west, several people suggested it would be helpful to have a group of women, like Roman Catholic Nuns, to pray for the Church.

This happened 130 years ago. Hannah Coombe, was invited to found the order. She studied with a group of Sisters in the US, then made her Life Vows, becoming the Reverend Mother of an

Anglican Community in Toronto now known as SSJD, or the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine.

In Toronto Reverend Mother first lived at Bishop Strachan School, where her sister was Head Mistress, and attended St. Mathias Church, the only Anglican Church which would accept Nuns. As well as the religious activities of her life, she taught Sunday School, took food to the sick and elderly, and dealt with the provision of dinners for convalescents.

During the Riel Rebellions she and her small group of Sisters were called to tend the wounded at Moose Jaw, then ran a Field Hospital at Batoche. She later received a medal from the Canadian Government.

Back in Toronto, she moved into a small stable, then acquired the large house next door and opened the first surgical hospital for women in Canada, at Euclid and Robinson Streets.

Since then SSJD has been involved with:

- Training nurses
- Convalescent care
- Rehabilitation
- Ministering Schools
- Running an Orphanage
- Helping the Mentally Handicapped
- Ministering to the Elderly
- Working with the Poor

All these things have been dealt with in addition to the four hours of daily prayer and other religious duties which are undertaken.

The Sisters have played a leading role in recent Liturgical Renewal by using BAS and making contributions to the Hymn Task Force; some have also written hymns.

Associates of SSJD are men and women, ordained or lay, of Anglican Parishes; people who seek to deepen their Christian Life. (Fabian Hugh, John Pilling, and Barry Curtis were all Priest Associates). The Sisters and Associates all live by a Rule of Life, in a relationship of mutual support in prayer, love, and ministry.

As Christians, all of us are encouraged to live by a Rule of Life. Page 555 of the BCP gives suggestions of how to draw one up for yourself.

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