

NEWMAN AND THE NATIONAL CHURCH

FROM whatever angle the Oxford Movement is examined, it is impossible to disregard the spirit of alarm which informed its opening phase. Reforms long overdue were beginning to take effect; further reforms of a more searching character were to follow. Outworn institutions and rusty machinery could not remain untouched when the national spirit was demanding radical developments in political and social institutions. Excluding a small body of the clergy, Englishmen of all ranks within and without the Established Church regarded that body and its ministers as an institution dependent for its existence upon the Body Politic. For them the Church of England was little more than a State Department;¹ and in common with the rest this too must submit to the reforms which it urgently required.

Since the days of Elizabeth the National Church had been immediately sensitive to every political development: each successive crisis had struck it violently and left deep scars. With the termination of the Stuart period and the rejection of 'Divine Right,' the great days of Caroline High Churchmanship had come to an end. The High Church party as an effective power died within the Church, whilst the Non-Juring Sect languished into insignificance from lack of an object. The volumes of Caroline divinity remained untouched on the library shelves: theological interests, rules of Christian Perfection and Sacramental Doctrine had become unfashionable. Jacobitism was a far more absorbing topic than the Fathers of the Church.

¹ cf. Bishop Warburton's *Alliance of Church and State*, which maintains that the Church preaches truth, the State pursues expediency; but Christian truth is identical with political expediency. There is no possible thesis which a preacher can put forth, or synod could define as true, but is infallibly determined to be such ('infallible' is his word) by the political expedience and experience of the State,—quoted from Newman's *Difficulties of Anglicans* (1913), p. 203.

Rationalism and the low moral standards in the Hanoverian times began to moderate the *ἰθoς* of the National Church. Convocation was indefinitely suspended; and an Episcopate subservient to Whig interests ensured that the Establishment should work in harmony with the current interests of the ruling families. Scepticism and indifference flowing unchecked through the open channel of Episcopal appointments infected the spiritual health of the Church of England by poisoning it with a distaste for learning, a distrust for holiness and a dislike for zeal. So long as Parliament was in the hands of the aristocratic families the Church enjoyed social exclusiveness; and with the Church went the Universities, which formed an integral part of the system. The Acts of Parliament which established the Church and its formularies were regarded not only as a necessity but as the bulwark and safeguard of English Protestantism. Whether such a diseased condition of Church polity was epidemic of the period or endemic in its constitution troubled no one of consequence: 'High' views upon the nature and function of the Church were as out-of-date as the Jacobites. The malady was not regarded as such; it was the sound and normal form of Christianity for the English gentry and their tenants. Recognition and diagnosis could only follow when the Liberal developments of the Nineteenth Century included the Establishment within their scope and induced a crisis in that body.

In the eighteen twenties the predominant interest was focussed upon Reform. Liberalism, the dynamic force in the political sphere, was already making its influence felt within the Church of England and was disturbing its security. If all Religious Tests were to be abolished as a condition of active citizenship; if Parliament was to open its doors to all shades of Nonconformity, surely the bounds of the Religious Establishment also should be widened to include the loose elements of Protestantism, whose secession had been due in large measure to political causes. Her prevailing temper was Protestant, and her ranks included

many whose religious convictions scarcely differed from those of the Sectarians. Latitudinarianism had already sapped away much of the dogmatic element and was prepared to accommodate Christian formularies to the needs of the time. The Church of England as a National Institution must no longer be the preserve of class; as with Parliament its exclusiveness must yield to the popular demand.

Disestablishment was the alternative remedy, but that seemed too drastic an operation at this period, since the English Church seemed to draw her life from the Estates of the Realm. If that separation took place, had she the vitality to persist as an organic unit? Her low religious standards gave this question real force, and set the proper emphasis upon her Erastian character.

The imminence of the crisis forced the clergy not only to review their own position, but to find an answer to the more urgent question, 'What is the Church?' The Erastian answered 'A State Department,' and for him there were no further difficulties. For the anti-Erastian, the answer involved considerations which, surpassing the simple question of polity, embraced the whole nature, function and practice of Christianity. The Catholic Church provided a complete solution, but fear and hatred for her was bred in the bone of all good Englishmen and provided occasion for public festivity and thanksgiving. Even the Caroline divines were universal in condemning her as the Kingdom of Anti-Christ.

For the leaders of the Oxford Movement the problem was primarily one of ecclesiastical liberty. Newman's own line of approach lay along the path of anti-Erastianism under the guidance of Whately, whose view of Church polity was the only point of sympathy between himself and Newman. To quote Newman's own words, '(the Movement) has been definite in its principles, though vague in their application and their scope. It has been formed on one ideal, which has developed into a body of teaching, logical in the arrangement of its portions, and consistent

with the principles on which it started. That idea, or first principle, was ecclesiastical liberty; the doctrine which it specially opposed was in ecclesiastical language, the heresy of Erastus, and in political, the Royal Supremacy. The object of its attack was the Establishment, considered simply as such.²

The first essential was the independence of the Church as supreme in her own spiritual sphere: 'Dogma would be maintained, sacraments would be administered, religious perfection would be attempted and venerated, if the Church were supreme in her spiritual power; dogma would be sacrificed to expedience, sacraments would be rationalized, perfection would be ridiculed, if she were made the slave of the State. Erastianism, then, was the one heresy which cut at the root of all revealed truth; the man who held it would soon fraternise with Unitarians, mistake the bustle of life for religious obedience, and pronounce his butler to be as able to give communion as his priest.'³ Three out of the four volumes of Froude's *Remains* are almost exclusively given up to this subject, which also pre-occupied in some shape or another the early numbers of the *Tracts*. What followed was the logical development of the first principle: 'It was for this that the writers had recourse to Antiquity, relied upon the Apostolic Succession, exalted the Episcopate, and appealed to the people, not because these things were true and right, but in order to shake off the State; they introduced them as means towards the inculcation of the idea of the Church.'⁴

With this object in view the leaders had no intention of forming a party within the Church;⁵ they were determined to prove to the Nation that the National Church depended

² *Difficulties of Anglicans* (1918), p. 101.

³ *Ibid.* p. 102.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 103.

⁵ Newman's sensitiveness to the danger of party limitations is clearly denoted in 1833 when with Froude he rejected Palmer's suggestion of Association. 'Living movements do not come of committees.'—*Apologia*, p. 107.

for nothing upon the State, for it was an integral part of the Church Catholic, with an Apostolic Hierarchy to rule and govern it, and an Apostolic mission that belonged to it by right of inheritance. The National Church was a complete self-sufficient organism; its nature was fundamentally sound; its sickness was but 'an accident in its constitution, and it was therefore capable of a remedy.'

In the light of this object the Movement must be judged. If the Church, in virtue of her National or Racial limitations, was incapable of an organic fulfilment of these claims, if its 'life' did not conform entirely to the 'life' of the Catholic and Apostolical Church as the leaders conceived it, the Movement would have applied an ineffective remedy. If the Movement itself solidified into a party before the whole body was energised, party limitations would stifle its radiating force; it would be classified as one more party in company with the Latitudinarian and Evangelical parties. The nature of the Establishment would remain substantially unaltered, whether it included one more party or one less. The Crown would continue to appoint the Bishops, while Parliament and Privy Council would safeguard it from too abrupt a departure from the National Spirit. It would continue to be as it had always been, Erastian, and therefore contrary to the principles of the Tractarians.

Once the Movement was launched, Keble's parochial duties and Froude's ill-health left its development principally in the hands of Newman; and for the first seven years the Movement followed the direction of its initial impetus under Newman's guidance in pursuit of its goal. The path to be followed led inevitably towards the traditional concept of the Universal Church. Of that danger Newman was fully aware; and his works of an anti-Roman character were written not so much with the intention of heading off the almost universal charge of Popery—the nearest and most effective weapon his opponents could lay their hands on—as from the apprehension that the full development of his principles could only be realised in the Catholic

Church. So long as he retained the leadership the Movement ran 'true,' in the sense that his own mind was moving purposefully, and his influence was causing other men to move in the same direction. The gravitational 'pull' exerted upon its increasing group of adherents was towards the Catholic Church and away from the Established Church, in the condition and circumstances which at that time crippled its activities: so far the latter had not assisted the process by the force of its sanctions.

The line of development led Newman to examine the features or 'marks' of the true Church which he hoped to discover in the Anglican Church. If these were not active, they should at least be potentially in her nature, and should be capable of fruitful development under the impulse of a proper stimulus. The first Note which the Movement heralded was that of Apostolicity. 'It appealed to the people, and that on the ground that it was Apostolical in its nature. It made the experiment of this appeal the very test of its Apostolicity.'⁶

'Let us recollect that we are an Apostolical Body; we were not made, nor can be unmade by our flocks; and if our influence is to depend on them, yet the Sacraments are lodged with us. We have that with us which none but ourselves possess, the mantle of the Apostles; and this, properly understood and cherished, will keep us from being the creatures of a population.'⁷

If the Establishment manifested Apostolicity, the Apostolic Succession must have been transmitted to its Bishops; their teaching must be that of the historic Church of Christ; their voice must have the sanction of Living Authority in ruling that Church. Whatever the views of the Bishops might be, this was their divinely appointed office and their vocation; in defence of their prerogatives they must be ready to suffer martyrdom. They were the living successors of the Apostles, enjoying their plenitude of Apostolic power; only by accident were they the servants of the

⁶ *Difficulties*. p. 60.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 60, 61.

English Crown. In Newman's words, 'The Movement started on the ground of maintaining ecclesiastical authority as opposed to the Erastianism of the State. It taught that this divinely founded Church was realised and brought into effect in our country in the National Establishment, which was the outward form or development of a continuous dynasty and hereditary power which descended from the Apostles. It gave then to that Establishment in its officers, its laws, its usages and its worship that devotion and obedience which are correlative to the very idea of the Church.'⁸

The grounds for this high doctrine were not abstract principles nor simply historical precedents. If the Apostolic Succession was true, it was because it was implied in the Ordination Service. The independence of the Church from the State was based upon 'the force of that article of our belief, the one Catholic and Apostolic Church.'

These arguments were admittedly reinforced by the Scriptures, the Fathers and the Anglican Divines; but for the theological system that was being erected, the Living Authority was the Book of Common Prayer,⁹ just as the Living Authority for the government of the Church was vested in the Episcopate.

In the obedience afforded to his own Bishop, Newman acted in strict conformity with this teaching. In 1838 he was prepared to withdraw the *Tracts* when certain animadversions upon them in the Episcopal Charge showed the first signs of official disapproval. 'A bishop's lightest word, *ex Cathedra*, is heavy. His judgment on a book cannot be light; it is a rare occurrence.'¹⁰ The ink was hardly dry when Whateley from the Protestant See of Dublin retorted: 'As to legislation for the Church, or authoritative declarations on many of the most important matters, neither any

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 130.

⁹ The Prayer Book 'was the fulcrum by which they were to hoist up the Establishment, and set it down securely on the basis of Apostolical Truth.'—*Ibid.* p. 135.

¹⁰ *Apologia* (1864), p. 157.

one Bishop, nor all collectively, have any more right of this kind than the ordinary magistrates have to take on the functions of Parliament.¹¹ The judgment was sharply expressed, but its tenor was that commonly held by the whole Bench of Bishops. Some may have felt pleasure in the prerogative the Movement gave them, but as family men and responsible Englishmen their reactions were sound; others were frankly shocked and said so.

The Living Authority for the theological system that was being built up could not rest for long upon the Prayer Book. Its formularies were at once too circumscribed in their content and too elastic in their form; furthermore they were Protestant in sympathy. Whence could a final interpretation in a Catholic sense be drawn? First from the Anglican divines: then, in case of doubt, from the Fathers of the Church, who sanctioned the authority of the divines.

For the leaders the appeal to the Fathers seemed to rest upon a solid foundation; their personal bias lay far more against the Protestant side than upon the Roman side. 'Protestantism was a present foe; Catholicism, or Romanism as they called it, was but a possible adversary.' This attitude was strengthened by the overwhelming evidence that the Fathers of the Church were themselves anti-Protestant. Nevertheless a more thorough study forced upon Newman issues which he had wished to leave on one side. The Church of the Fathers manifested claims and characteristics which were uncomfortably like those of the Roman Church. The history of the early heresies afforded precedents which seemed to fit the condition of Anglicanism in relation to her National limitations. In the Church of the Fathers and in the Roman Church, there was the same determination to be supreme in her own sphere; the same distrust of the State; the same claim to be the one Ark of Salvation for all peoples, irrespective of National limits. All this was characteristic of the ancient Church and of

¹¹ *Difficulties*, pp. 111, 112.

Rome to-day. Even if Antiquity might seem to be on the side of his concept of Anglicanism, Universality certainly was not; furthermore, Antiquity emphasised the essential nexus between Apostolicity and Universality. Could the Church possess the one without the other? Some of his followers saw the weakness; Catholicity or Universality was the predominant and traditional Note of the Roman Church, not simply in virtue of her claims, but as an active factor of her continuous organic existence. History presented instance after instance in her struggle with the powers of this world wherein her Universality had saved her from complete extinction. A part might suffer, but the rest of the Body retained its life.

Rome was familiar with these periodic conflicts against both medieval Empire and modern State; no persecution could force her to accommodate her polity or her doctrines to the changing fashions of secular thought and to the demands of political organisms, be they despotic, democratic or communist. She was at once intangible and intransigent, Catholic and Apostolic.

Newman's rate of advance was outstripping the growing nucleus of the Movement. Consistent development from the first principle was revealing that Antiquity as the basis of Anglicanism, such as the leaders had conceived it, was as unstable as the Carolines and the Prayer Book. 'The divines of the Movement had reared a goodly house, but their foundations were falling in. The soil and the masonry both were bad. The Fathers *would* protect Romanists, as well as extinguish Dissenters. The Anglican divines *would* misquote the Fathers, and shrink from the very doctors to whom they appealed. The Bishops of the seventeenth century were shy of the Bishops of the fourth; and the Bishops of the nineteenth were shy of the Bishops of the seventeenth.'¹²

The 'Via Media' expresses Newman's attempt to justify the Apostolicity of the Anglican Church in terms of the 'Branch Theory.' Attractive as that theory is to many, it

¹² *Difficulties*. p. 151.

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could not provide him with a final resting place. The interdependence of the Apostolic and Catholic Notes of the Church was opening a further stage of development, and he could not make his concept of Anglicanism square with Catholicity. The Anglican Church had manifested Universality neither in intention nor in effect; of its very nature it was bounded by the limits of the English race and the English dominions. If its appeal was world-wide, that appeal could only be made in virtue of its Protestantism, in direct conflict with the Catholic Church.

The misgivings he felt at this time in relating his developed concept to the Establishment disposed his mind to the crisis which St. Augustine's 'Securus judicat orbis terrarum' brought upon him. 'To take a familiar instance, they were like the "Turn again Whittington" of the chime; or, to take a more serious one, they were like the "Tolle, lege—Tolle, lege," of the child, which converted St. Augustine himself. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum!" By those great words of the ancient Father, interpreting and summing up the long and varied course of ecclesiastical theory, the theory of the *Via Media* was absolutely pulverised.'¹³

In 1841 there occurred the two events which were decisive in severing Newman from the Movement. By the first, the 'Jerusalem Bishopric,' the English and Prussian crowns were to form a political instrument in the East, parallel to that which Russia had in the Greek Church, and France in the Latin. The Anglican Church 'was not only forbidding any sympathy or concurrence with the Church of Rome, but it actually was courting an intercommunion with Protestant Prussia and the heresy of the Orientals. The Anglican Church might have the Apostolical Succession, as had the Monophysites; but such acts as were in progress led me to the gravest suspicion, not that it would soon cease to be a Church, but that, since the sixteenth century, it had never been a Church all along.'¹⁴ The control of the Crown

¹³ *Apologia*. p. 212

¹⁴ *Apologia*. p. 248.

over the Anglican polity was still operative, and the Crown set small store by theological principles.

The second event was the sudden storm of indignation which greeted the publication of *Tract 90*. This was no party or domestic disturbance confined to the University or the Clergy; its dimensions embraced every national element, and its intensity was comparable to that evoked by the Popish Plot. 'Soon the living rulers of the Establishment began to move. . . . They fearlessly handselled their Apostolic weapons upon the Apostolical Party. One after another, in long succession, they took up their song and their parable against it. It was a solemn war-dance, which they executed round victims, who by their very principles were bound hand and foot, and could only eye with disgust and perplexity this most unaccountable movement, on the part of their "holy Fathers, the representatives of the Apostles, and the Angels of the Churches." It was the beginning of the end.'¹⁵ Never had Episcopal opinion been so unanimous in condemnation, supported as it was by the outraged feelings of a Protestant people.

The withdrawal of Newman deprived the Movement of its sense of direction; the shock of solid opposition dissipated its gathering mass and definitely retarded its initial impulse. Its form began to harden into the recognisable features of a party within the National Church. While it is true that the energy of the Movement was sufficiently powerful to preserve that party in the face of bitter and prolonged persecution, it was insufficient to inform the entire Anglican polity with its principles. Whatever Anglo-Catholicism has achieved in the course of the past century, its name designates the views and policy of a party inside the Anglican Church; it does not connote the 'nature' of the Establishment; and its party still remains in communion with other parties whose views run counter both to traditional Christianity and to the principles of the Movement.

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¹⁵ *Difficulties*. p. 152.