

# Anglo-Catholicism.

## Its Strength and Weakness.

I GLADLY accept the courteous invitation extended to me to write in this Magazine on the subject of the Anglo-Catholic Movement. For such an invitation I am most grateful, as we are only too anxious that our real aims should be known by others. I fully realize that much that I shall say will be untenable by my readers, but this article is entirely explanatory and not argumentative in its purpose.

I must preface my remarks by a personal explanation. I am no well-known figure in Anglo-Catholic circles, and I have no right to speak with any authority for others. I am just a very ordinary Parish Priest in a crowded London area, with but little time for writing magazine articles, and with but very little chance of getting people to read what I do write! But possibly we Parish Priests, engaged all day in purely pastoral work in our parishes, can be better judges of such a Movement as the Anglo-Catholic activities than a select Committee sitting round a table and discussing theoretical problems. I presume the invitation to write this article came to me because my parish is an "Anglo-Catholic" one, and also because the one who gave the invitation knows that I am one of those people who say exactly what they feel and are not given to keeping back criticisms because they may meet with disapproval. At the commencement of what I have to say let me endeavour to explain as simply as I can what our Movement stands for. Put simply it is this, the continuation of the Oxford Movement, which was to revive the ideal of the Catholic Church and to claim that the Church of England is a living part of that Church. It is our desire to follow as humbly and as loyally as we can such famous leaders as Pusey, Keble, the saintly Bishop King of Lincoln, Bishop Wilkinson of St. Andrews, Canon Scott-Holland, and Father Stanton of St. Albans, Holborn. What was it these men stood for? I think we may summarize the answer by saying that it was the demand that the Church of England was an integral part of the Catholic Church founded on the Day of Pentecost. We claim that the Church of England with its insistence on the Sacramental system—a system that in past days was nearly forgotten—was and is part of the Historic Church of Christendom. We deny that any "new" Church came into existence at the Reformation. If we talk of a "reformed"

man we mean that it is the same man and not a different man who has been reformed. So with the phrase "The Reformed Church." It is the same Church, reformed in certain ways but still the same historic Church with its Sacraments and Ministry. Those who know our Movement best are fully aware that our main effort is the saving of souls and not mere empty external questions of ceremonial. I shall say more on this point anon. Every day throughout this year and last year there have been "Days of Prayer for the conversion of England" to the Catholic Faith. We have not given up our time to praying that Churches may in increasing numbers use Vestments, or so on. These Days of Prayer which have had such a truly wonderful response in crowded towns and isolated villages have been great adventures in the realm of Prayer for the winning of souls to God. And we believe most intensely that the best and only way of really winning souls is by teaching the Catholic Faith. I hope my readers will understand that I use the word "Catholic" in no small sense, such as "Roman," but in the fuller and more glorious explanation given in the *Te Deum* as "The Holy Church throughout all the world." We believe that The Catholic Church is the Divine scheme for the salvation of souls, with all its historic continuity and Sacramental means of Grace. It is this insistence on the Historic Church which makes us safeguard so strongly the three-fold Orders of the Sacred Ministry. If I may speak very frankly I would honestly say that I see no chance of our re-union with any who would ask us to deny the opening sentence of the Ordinal in our Book of Common Prayer, viz., "It is evident unto all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that since the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests and Deacons." I am afraid many people imagine our main efforts are confined to such secondary matters as Ceremonial. I can only ask my readers to accept my assurance that such is not the case. We have found Ceremonial of great help and teaching power, but all Anglo-Catholics readily assert that though we regard a decent Ceremonial as a great help and incentive to worship, yet we fully realize it is a secondary matter. We are really endeavouring in our Movement to put first things first, and the first thing is personal loyalty to God and His Church.

Having now, I hope, cleared the ground as to what our real aims are, let us go on to see what the strength and weakness of the Anglo-Catholic Movement are. I hope it will be obvious that as regards dealing with our weaknesses my intention is to be as frank as one can possibly be. May I therefore ask that I may be given credit for the same honest frankness in speaking of the strength of the Movement.

OUR STRENGTH.

It is impossible within the space at my disposal to enter in detail into many points of which one could write. I will only take those points which from my parochial experience I find are the main cause for the average man desiring to join the Anglo-Catholic effort.

(1) Our appeal to History undoubtedly wins the allegiance of many. In this ever-changing world men long for Continuity, and we tell them that the most continuous thing to-day is the historic Church of Christ. Nations may fade away in power or even disappear entirely, Governments pass away from the stage of history with an almost alarming regularity. Famous men and women live their little life and pass into The Beyond. But the Church of Christ goes on its unbroken way and even if its numbers at times may decrease, yet its influence grows continually. Christians have always been a minority, but they have exercised a far greater influence on the history of the world than all the majorities. The Church of Christ has all down the ages met with every kind of persecution that the mind of man could devise to oppose it. Theological, national, civil, legal and military powers have done their best to kill Christianity, but the Historic Church still goes on its conquering way, thus showing its Divine power which alone could withstand such opposition as has been meted out to it. It has gone forward in the face of persecution of every kind, and still to-day it lives and is the world's greatest power. It owes nothing to "popularity." And men weary of changes and of an ever-increasing lack of Brotherhood look around them with wistful eyes to see what is really lasting. And we point them to the Church of Christ with its unbroken history. Without doubt this appeal to the Historic Church, of which we claim that the Church of England is an integral part, wins followers in great numbers.

(2) Although as I have already stated we regard a decent and beautiful Ceremonial as a secondary matter, yet we do not by any means belittle it. We find that a reasonable and sane desire for Ceremonial is a great need in men's minds to-day. The world longs for greater beauty amidst the terribly drab and dreary surroundings of so many lives. But our desire for a more beautiful external for our worship is no mere aesthetic wish. Our desire for Ceremonial is the response to our inner feelings that God should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness, and so our Ceremonial is a homage which we endeavour to pay to The Divine Majesty. To worship God in a Church of unprepossessing surroundings whilst in our own homes we try to surround ourselves with all that is artistic and lovely seems to us to be wrong. The Old Testament teaches us that God willed no

slovenly external worship. His instructions to Moses as to the smallest details of The Tabernacle Worship assures us that He will gratefully accept our efforts to worship Him with the homage of beauty and Art. We regard all Art of whatever form to be an offering which we can in our worship offer back to Him Who created and inspired it all. The simple Christmas decorations in some poor cottage or slum dwelling speaks of the innate desire to make things beautiful as an expression of corporate joy. This instinct we feel should be "christianized" and so save our Churches from being the dullest and ugliest building in the Parish. But, again, allow me to insist that it is not a mere aesthetic taste, but a homage on our part to the God Who made "all things bright and beautiful." We merely try to give Him of His own when we bring beauty and Art into our worship. But in some cases History again comes into the picture. Vestments, for instance, are used because we know from history that they are the "official uniform" of the Celebrant as he stands at the Altar to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries of the Holy Church. The surplice is the innovation and not Vestments. And we cling to these historical robes just as a "Beef-eater" at the Tower of London rejoices in his historic uniform and would be dumb-founded if Parliament ordered the historic uniform to be discarded for the Boy Scouts' uniform on the score that the old uniform was a relic of past ages.

(3) Another appeal which the Anglo-Catholic Movement makes is the insistence on a Disciplined Inner Life. We are beginning to realize anew that if a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing well. Thus we endeavour to bring a new thoroughness into our Christian life. What we are ready to do in the sphere of sport or art, namely, to take real pains and practise self-discipline, we feel we must do in the spiritual realm. Let us illustrate this by two examples. The Fast before Communion. We teach that this has always been the ancient custom of the Catholic Church, and though there is no definite Church rule yet ancient custom has to all intents and purposes made it a rule conditional upon physical fitness. May I be pardoned if I quote my own experience. In my younger days I regarded "Fasting Communion" as nonsense. But gradually I found that as I recalled the tremendous sacredness of God's Gift to me of His Body and Blood I felt that so sacred a Gift demanded a bodily discipline from very reverence. Since I have learnt to submit to such voluntary discipline The Holy Communion has become a new Service altogether, and my experience could be substantiated by the experience of thousands. Or to take another instance. Consider the question of Confession. Again—in my youth the word to me was "a red rag to a bull." But as one grew in the

spiritual realm I found myself demanding some such spiritual aid and I found that the Prayer Book made full provision for it. Any Anglican Priest who teaches compulsory Confession is disloyal to the Church of England. But so is he who deliberately hides this spiritual method from his people. Our teaching is that Confession is open to all but compulsory on none. The Church knows no compulsion as to its use or neglect. And the experience of those who have used this spiritual exercise is that it is of the greatest value. An ounce of experience is worth hours of discussion or shelves of books.

(4) Again, we stress Learning. By means of Conferences, and Congresses up and down the Country the Anglo-Catholic Movement is "out to teach." Men to-day do not want what has been called "the worst form of vice—advice." They want instruction. The crowds in a London Park are thickest round the stand of the man who will teach the reason for his Faith and not round the pulpit of the man who merely gives moral exhortation. And so the Anglo-Catholic Movement is winning many a recruit by asking people to learn and think for themselves. By the issue of well got-up cheap and popular booklets dealing with the Catholic Faith we are helping people to think things out for themselves and giving them such simple help as we can. In our Churches we find a sale that astonishes us for the well-got-up 3d. Anglo-Catholic Manuals of Instruction.

(5) The last reason which I will advance for our growing numbers is the insistence that The Catholic Faith must be connected with our daily Life. For example, we stress the point that mere reception of The Blessed Sacrament is not enough. We have to live that Divinely received Life in our daily transactions and behaviour. To worship God and be untouched by the social problems of the day is wrong. We cannot love God and go on "nagging" our next door neighbour. Christianity has not always associated Faith and Practice as it should. But our insistence on this need is one great source of influence in the Anglo-Catholic Movement. When our profession of Christianity really colours our daily lives and contact with our neighbours then people are ready to know the secret, and the Anglo-Catholic answers, "You cannot really love God and yet be isolated from your neighbour and his problems."

But now let me turn to point out quite frankly some of our weaknesses.

(1) Paradoxical though it may sound, many of us regard our very success as our greatest danger. Woe-betide our work when it becomes "a popular thing" to be an Anglo-Catholic, and that danger is a very real one. Many in our midst are trying to run before they have learnt to walk. There is a grave danger that

people will accept Anglo-Catholicism as "the sort of thing to do" without having taken the trouble to realize all we stand for and the discipline which we insist on. It is here that the cult of the Ceremonial becomes so deadly. The external signs of Catholicity are useless unless backed by the inner Faith. The Church which uses Vestments, for example, because so many others are using them is a real danger and hindrance to our work. Quite frankly I admit that this danger does lurk in our midst. The first essential is definite and systematic teaching.

(2) There is also the danger lest Anglo-Catholics shall think more of their own special presentation of the Truth and of external aids than of the Church Catholic. We all know cases where the danger lurks of loyalty to a certain personality rather than to the Church as such. Quite recently this grave danger was boldly pointed out by *The Church Times*, which cannot be regarded as a foe to our Movement!

(3) Our work is being rendered more difficult by the "extreme" Party in our midst. It is useless denying that they are there and that they are a very real source of danger. Unless they are content with what they can find in the Church of England I for one wish devoutly they would join the Church of Rome. Unfortunately these "extremists" get mentioned far more in the Press than the huge loyal body of Anglo-Catholics. The vast majority of us are ready to fight any Papal jurisdiction over the Church of England. We are totally out of sympathy with the claim made by a few of the extreme party that the Laity should be denied The Chalice. We desire to honour The Mother of God as the greatest Lady of the Ages and honoured by God as no other woman was, but we refuse to offer Her the worship which alone can be given to and accepted by Her Divine Son. But, unfortunately, the excesses of a few are regarded typical of the whole. The main body of Anglo-Catholics are absolutely sound and safe as regards such matters.

(4) We have much to learn as to our Missionary duty. It would be false to pretend that as a whole the Anglo-Catholic Churches are doing their full share in the Missionary work of The Church. The Vestry Books with their details of Offertories would soon prove the contrary. But—thank God—this weakness is being remedied very largely now. But alas, a keen missionary-hearted Anglo-Catholic Church is the exception rather than the rule at present. But this matter is being attended to by an ever-increasing number, and we long for the day when the Anglo-Catholics can equal the Evangelical School of thought in their Missionary devotion.

(5) I promised to write frankly, and so I must not omit what is perhaps one of the gravest difficulties we have to face,

though I am sure my readers will realize my difficulty in writing on this point. Until the Bishops of the Church are more united amongst themselves we must not look for any great increase in the unity amongst Priests and Laity. One Bishop authorizes what his Brother Bishop of the next Diocese refuses, and the rest of us are left in a muddle that is at once unwholesome and difficult. I believe if the Bishops would speak with a united voice and not merely from their own personal prejudices there would be a response which would astonish everyone. We are often accused of "Bishop-baiting," but the truth is that we are pathetically trying to render absolute loyalty to our superiors and to work loyally with them. But as long as each individual Bishop is the judge of what he will allow or disallow, where are we? With our insistence on the three-fold Ministry which I have mentioned above are we likely to be the ones who want to go "Bishop-baiting"? If the Bishops would only summon their Synods and compel the attendance of all their Priests and take counsel with them, half our difficulties would disappear. It is ignorance of each other's stand-point which causes so much trouble to-day. If the Bishops would summon us all, regardless of "parties" to their Diocesan Synods and allow each side to explain fully what they are really out for, the Church of England would be stronger and more peaceful than at present. But until we Priests get that opportunity for mutual discussion and learning, I see no great hopes of a better mutual understanding, and in this case it is the Bishops alone who can take the initial step. In a Diocesan Synod the Priests have no executive status, but are purely a consultative body for the Bishop to consult. It allows all sections of theological thought to explain their position and all can thus learn from each other. Surely this is an obvious way in which greater internal unity within the Church of England can be gained, and the Anglo-Catholic Party earnestly desire it. May I end as I began by reminding my readers that I have tried to write purely from an explanatory point of view. I am fully aware that our views are in many cases diametrically opposed to those who are the regular readers of this Magazine, but only good can come of any attempt to know each other's stand-point better. That is the sole reason why I accepted so kind an invitation to write on this subject.

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