

## Anglo-Catholic Anglicans

The word Catholic was at first used to describe the universality of the Church but later the term was applied to the reliability and primitiveness of its teaching as contrasted with the novelties of some of the heretical sects. When Christendom became divided the Catholic Church could still be recognised by its continuity with the past and by its custody of the ancient Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Apostolic Ministry. "As the main body of the sea being one, yet within divers precincts hath divers names, so the Catholic Church is in like sort divided into a number of distinct societies, every one of which is termed a Church within itself" (1)

The Church came to England with the missionaries from Rome and the Celtic lands. St. Augustine with his missionaries converted the south-east of England and founded the Sees of Canterbury, Rochester and London. The missionaries from the north converted Northumbria and penetrated to the Midlands. The zeal of Wilfrid brought the converted kingdoms under the spiritual primacy of Rome, which gave to the English Church a discipline and cohesion which it would never have gained from the Celtic missionaries. Later with the Norman Conquest the Church was strengthened both in discipline, morals and administration by being brought again into closer communion with Rome.

From this ancient and medieval Church there has never been a complete break. At the Reformation there was indeed a breach with the Pope and this breach was great as it ultimately meant separation from the rest of Western Catholicism. However, no one intended to cut themselves off from the Holy Catholic Church and to replace it with a new Church. The Catholic Church in England claimed that they were only removing that which was unknown in the early undivided Church and opposed to the teaching of the Scriptures and the Fathers. Bishop Jewel of Salisbury, in his "Apology for the Church of England," asserted: "We have planted no new religion, but only have renewed the old that was undoubtedly founded and used by the Apostles of Christ and other holy Fathers in the primitive Church." (2) During the changes made in the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth the great majority of the clergy remained in their benefices until promotion or death.

Careful provision was made for the keeping of continuity by the consecration of Archbishop Parker by bishops who had all been duly consecrated themselves. Also significant evidence of the preservation of continuity is seen by the way in which, throughout all the changes of the Reformation period ecclesiastical administration remained unhampered. "Through all this, the processes of ecclesiastical law had gone forward in the old way. Apart from the changes of constitution in certain cathedral churches consequent upon the suppression of the monasteries and from the creation of a few new dioceses, there are few alterations to be traced. The ordinary jurisdiction of bishops remained as in the past. Officials and vicars-general still exercised their delegated authority. In the official records of English dioceses for this period traces of contemporary changes are few and far between. Bishops were deprived of their sees and burned for heresy, but the business of diocesan administration founded upon centuries of long practice was not interrupted for a single day." (3) It is also significant that before, during and after the breach with Rome successive Archbishops used in their legal documents the same title *Ecclesia Anglicana*. The rejection of papal authority and changes both in ritual and ceremonial did not break the continued and uninterrupted work of the administration of the Church.

Dr. G. R. Owst in his book, "Preaching in Medieval England," gives an interesting example of continuity. He is describing the various little devotional manuals and treatises which were in use at the end of the Middle Ages. They were supplies from the pulpit as well as an important supply for it. They passed into countless homes and helped to create the English type of domestic piety; they were handed on from one generation to another. "Sometimes the subsequent careful notes and scoring, the names entered by later hands in these very sermons and handbooks, seem to give almost tangible evidence of the continuity of use. Their influence stalks on silent, but wonderfully real and alive from generation to generation, troubling little about the noisy clash of theologians and parties without. For round the family board, and in the hearts of the peasantry, the Reformation meant no such break with the past as many would have us believe." (4)

On one other occasion there was danger that the continuity of the Church of England might be shattered. Under the Commonwealth episcopacy was abolished, the use of the Prayer Book made illegal, the cathedrals desecrated, and the clergy deprived of their benefices. The places of the dispossessed clergy were often filled by men with little or no training, but with the Restoration the danger to the Church passed away. "Exiled bishops returned to their sees, new bishops were consecrated, and the deprived clergy went back to their parishes. Ministers who had taken the place of the ejected clergy were compelled to resign unless they were episcopally ordained and promised to conform to the Prayer Book. The continuity of the Church had been threatened but it had never been broken." (5)

But continuity of the Church as an organisation is not enough to mean that it is Catholic. A Church to be Catholic must keep the Catholic Faith, prize the Catholic Scriptures, administer the Catholic Sacraments, and keep the Catholic Ministry. The Anglican Church clearly proclaims to all that it is Catholic. In its Creeds its members declare that they believe in the Holy Catholic Church. In the Prayer Book it prays for "the good estate of the Catholic Church, that it may be so guided and governed by thy good spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life." The Anglican Church's claim to be Catholic is proved by its acceptance of the three great Catholic Creeds, the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanasian; by its belief in the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures; by its faithful administration of the Dominical Sacraments, as generally necessary for salvation, Baptism and the Holy Communion; and by its threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. At no time has it ever lost these unique marks of the Catholic Church. Its possession of them unites us back to the undivided Church and to the whole Catholic Church throughout the world today. We as members of the Anglican Church thus share in the rich heritage of the Saints. By our baptism we are admitted to the holy fellowship to which Augustine, Aidan, Anselm, Hugh of Lincoln, Julian of Norwich, Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes and Bishop Ken and Temple belonged.

The great contribution which the Oxford Movement made to the Anglican Church of the nineteenth century was its demand that its bishops, clergy and laity should never forget that the Church of which they were the officers and members was not a department of the State or Empire but that it was the Catholic Church and as such had an historic and independent life of its own. It brought to light beauty and mystery in the Church's public worship and in its devotional life which for long had been ignored or forgotten. It revived practices of Catholic discipline which had been allowed for generations to decay. It called aloud to all to hear that the established privileges of the Church were as nothing compared to the splendour of its position as the Holy Catholic Church.

1) Richard Hooker, "*The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*" Book 3 Chapter 1 1593

(2) A. Hamilton Thompson in "*Essays Catholic and Critical*" The Reformation, p.361 1926

(3) Cyril Garbett, "*The Claims of the Church of England*", p15 1947

(4) G. R. Owst "*Preaching in Medieval England*" p.80 1926 as in S Wabuda "*Preaching During the English Reformation*" 2002 p.4

(5) Cyril Garbett, "*The Claims of the Church of England*", p17 194

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