

LIBERATING ORTHODOXY: THE ADVENTURE OF ANGLO-CATHOLICISM

By John Orens

I. Sanctified Ambiguity

Anglo-Catholics have always been an exotic species. In nineteenth-century Boston they were especially rare, and Anglo-Catholic monks were all but unheard of. So when the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, the Cowley Fathers, opened a church on Beacon Hill, their arrival was greeted with a mixture of bewilderment and dismay. The story goes that one day a mother and her young daughter encountered one of the monks on his way to church. Astonished by the appearance of the tall figure in his black habit, the little girl turned to her mother and asked, "What's that?" Sweeping her child into her arms, the mother replied as she rushed away, "That, my dear, is a fanatic."

We Anglo-Catholics have a well-deserved reputation for fanaticism. Sometimes we are fanatical about things that ultimately do not matter: vestments and thuribles, processions and genuflections. Sometimes we are fanatical about things that do matter, such as doctrine and church order, but for the wrong reasons. And sometimes we are just plain fanatical. Consider, for example, the story of Father Wagner of Brighton, who spent his entire fortune building odd churches. One he insisted be given the precise dimensions of Noah's ark. Another, the underground Chapel of the Resurrection, became so damp that it was eventually turned into a facility for storing meat. His father, the Vicar of Brighton, so despaired of his son's improvidence that he poured out his grief in a sermon which took as its text a prayer the vicar himself had composed: "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic."

I share this story with you to emphasize how daring our journey into the heart of Anglo-Catholicism will be. I need not remind you that we are undertaking it in perilous times for the Anglican Communion and for the Episcopal Church. And given our well-deserved reputation for cantankerousness, it might seem wise to forget our story and leave well enough alone. But look around this church Sunday after Sunday. While provinces are snarling at one another, and parishes are packing their bags for Nigeria, here we all are, in communion with one another, in communion with our bishop, in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and all this despite our sometimes very deep differences.

How have we managed to do this? It is not because we are nice people, although most of the time we are. Rather, it is because we have begun to understand that beneath our Anglo-Catholic lunacy and fanaticism lies a holy passion that seeks to heal, not to harm, a passion grounded in Catholic orthodoxy. It is odd, I know, to link orthodoxy to healing and passion. We are used to thinking of orthodoxy as blinkered and narrow minded, a set of doctrines to which we must blindly give our assent. But this conception of orthodoxy is gravely mistaken. The Greek *ortho doxa* means not so much "right belief" as "right glory." Catholic orthodoxy is not propositional, but iconic and relational. It is a way: a way of prayer and adoration, of love and service, whose doctrinal roots nourish a vision of breathtaking openness. Spiritually passionate and intellectually paradoxical, Catholic orthodoxy points to a liberation we can scarce imagine.

To be an Anglo-Catholic, then, is to set one's face to the future and to live in hope. But to understand that future we must first travel to the past, for if there is one lesson we need to learn, especially in these troubled times, it is that openness has been woven into our vocation from the beginning. The Catholic faith did not drop down from heaven on the apostles' heads nor was it deduced once and for all by the Church fathers. It grew out of the worship, the doubts, and even the disputes of God's people, just as it continues to grow here, in this parish, in your hearts and in mine. It is always certain yet ever incomplete. In other words, the story of faith is the story of sanctified ambiguity. Our task is to enter into this strange and liberating saga,

and as befits a passionate people who have been taught to look for the extraordinary in the ordinary, there is no better place to begin our journey than in the court of that most passionate yet most unsavory of monarchs, Henry VIII.

As we all know, Henry VIII severed the ties between the Church of England and Rome not because he wanted a new faith, but because he needed a new wife. His motives were political, not religious, and as long as he lived, the doctrine and worship of the Church remained very much as it had been for centuries. Thus, when he died in 1547, he left behind an ecclesiastical anomaly: a Church that was Catholic but not Roman, a Church that was honeycombed with Protestants even as Protestants were being persecuted. The uncertainty that hung over the Church only deepened in the years that followed. To be sure, during the reign of Henry's son, Edward VI, the Protestants who were then ascendant dearly wanted to make the Church theologically neat and tidy. But they were not strong enough—perhaps they were not zealous enough—to extirpate the Church's Catholic identity. They smashed altars, shattered stained-glass windows, and eliminated the Latin Mass. But they retained the three-fold order of Catholic ministry, and when Archbishop Cranmer composed the Book of Common Prayer, he filled it with exquisite translations of the medieval Latin liturgy. Thus, far from eliminating theological ambiguity, the reformers actually intensified it. And for this, thanks be to God, for it would be the vocation of Catholic-minded Anglicans at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the next to turn this unsanctified muddle into a vehicle of holiness.

To appreciate what they accomplished, it is important to understand that Anglicanism as we know it might never have been. Had Edward lived longer, Protestants would eventually have pushed the Church ever closer to its continental cousins. In the end, his reign was short, but when he died in 1553, he was succeeded by his Roman Catholic half-sister, Mary, and had she lived longer or had she had a child, Anglicanism would have been extirpated altogether. But she died childless in 1558, opening the door to a new monarch, Elizabeth, and a to a new chapter in the history of the Catholic faith, for providence and history were about to meet. What Elizabeth's religious opinions were we do not know, for she was intensely secretive. What we do know is that she was determined to end the religious conflicts that had divided her kingdom. And she was convinced that the way to do so was not eliminate ambiguity, but to mandate it.

The ties to Rome were severed once again—the Church of England would go its own way—but the Church was to be comprehensive enough to accommodate all but the most extreme Protestants and Catholics. "I will not make windows into men's souls," the Queen promised. What she meant is perhaps best revealed by how the words of administration addressed by the priest to the people at holy communion were changed. In the first Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549 when the Protestant ascendancy was not yet complete, those words implied that Christ was truly present in the sacrament. As he gave the people the consecrated bread, the priest was to say: "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." In 1552 those words were replaced by the beautiful but sacramentally denuded exhortation: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving." The Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559 resolved the disagreement between these two radically different theologies by joining one sentence to the other, leaving the priest breathless as he recited, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving."

What did the Prayer Book teach about the eucharist? Whatever, it seemed, you would like it to teach. As a well-known sixteenth-century ditty put it:

His was the word that spake it,
 He took the bread and brake it,
 And what his word doth make it,
 That I believe and take it.

It was not very principled, and over the centuries this formula has fostered a great deal of bad theology and very bad liturgy. Even when it was first propounded, not everyone was happy with it. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was Puritans, eager to expunge the Church's Catholic heritage and to indulge their passion for theological exactitude, who complained the loudest. But toward the end of Elizabeth's reign a Catholic movement was stirring, and for its leaders comprehension became something very different than what the Queen had intended: not a political device to quiet men's souls, but a holy lens to see into God's heart.

The greatest of these proto-Catholics, and surely the most influential, was Richard Hooker, the author of a magnificent book with the intimidating title, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. In it, Hooker propounded a dynamic theory of religious truth. Unlike the Puritans of his day, and some evangelicals in our own, who insist that the Bible alone is the standard of truth, Hooker argued that Scripture must be interpreted in the light of reason and in the context of Church tradition. In other words, religious truth can only be discerned through an ongoing conversation. But Hooker went further still. We spend too much time talking about God, he wrote, and too little time worshipping him. Prayer, he insisted, is more important than precision, just as reading is more important than ranting, and sacraments are more important than sermons. And when Puritans complained, as some folks do today, that to elevate common prayer over doctrine is to allow people with all sorts of wrong opinions into the Church, Hooker was unrepentant. He reminded his critics that the Church is constituted by our shared participation in Christ, not by our opinions. "Let me die," he exclaimed, "if ever it be proved that simply an error doth exclude from hope of life. If it be an error to think that God may be merciful to save men when they err, my greatest comfort is my error."

This is not to say that Hooker was lax when it came to fundamentals. Nor does it mean that he had no theological opinions of his own. He did, and some of them, I must admit, were not as Catholic in the technical sense as we at St. Paul's might like. But what is most important about Hooker, and what is indisputably Catholic, is the incarnational reverence and sacramental wonder that informs everything he wrote. And so it is that after a long discussion of the eucharistic controversies that rent the sixteenth-century Church—much as other controversies rend today's Church—Hooker calls his readers, and us with them, from disputation to adoration. "What these elements are in themselves," he confesses, "it skilleth not. It is enough that to me which takes them, they are the body and blood of Christ....Why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant than this, *O my God thou art true, O my soul thou art happy?*" In this sacramental vision, Hooker helped set orthodoxy free so that you and I might be set free to enter into God's unspeakable truth and unfathomable glory.

It is a vision that can speak to our current disarray, if we will allow it. And in this vision we can discern five defining marks of the Anglo-Catholic temperament:

1. *A reluctance to define the truth too narrowly.* This is not because the truth is unimportant, but because it is too large for us to grasp. However much we know, there is always more that we do not.

2. *An emphasis on worship rather than academic theology.* To put it another way, it is the understanding that worship is the soil from which doctrine springs and provides the context in which it must be interpreted.

3. *Sacramental mysticism.* By this I mean the conviction that what we receive from worship and what is conveyed to us in the sacraments is not a metaphysical theory or moral lesson. Rather, it is nothing less than our mutual participation in God himself.

4. *Reverence for the Church and for its unity.* The Puritans of Hooker's day, like many Protestants, saw the Church as a gathered society of believers. For Hooker, on the other hand, the Church was not an assembly of the like-minded or the right-minded, but a sacred organism, and thus it was neither ours to make nor ours to break. A few decades later, Jeremy Taylor explained this in words that have lost none of their power. "It is not the differing opinions that is the cause of our present ruptures," he wrote, "but want of charity; it is not the variety of understandings, but the disunion of wills and affections; it is not the several

principles, but the several ends, that cause our miseries...we, by this time, are come to that pass, we think we love not God except we hate our brother, and we have not the virtue of religion, unless we persecute all religions but our own.”

5. *A communitarian ethos.* From Hooker on, Catholic-minded Anglicans have been aware that just as we are embedded in the community of faith, so we are embedded in the community of the world, the community of our fellow human beings who, like us, bear the image of God.

As Hooker and others like him embraced these marks of Catholic faith, the ambiguity that Elizabeth had imposed as a political necessity became instead a vehicle for sanctity. This living orthodoxy, I believe, has the power to transform our Church and to renew our faith and worship. That was certainly its effect in Hooker’s day and in the half century that followed. By the reign of Charles I, who came to the throne in 1625, it was the sacramentalists who were in command of the Church, and the outward and visible signs of their vision were everywhere to be seen. Our Anglo-Catholic forbears replaced the bare communion tables that the Protestant reformers had put in the chancels with properly adorned altars and set them where they belonged: against the east wall of the church. They brought back candles, vestments, and even incense. But more important than these signs was the inward and spiritual grace that gave them birth, a grace nourished by the writers we call the Caroline divines: Jeremy Taylor and John Donne, Lancelot Andrewes and George Herbert, and still others now forgotten except by scholars.

They lived, as did Hooker, in an age of theological controversy, and much of their work was devoted to defending the Church from Roman Catholic critics on the one hand, and Puritans on the other. Yet valuable though these polemics were in deepening the Church’s awareness of its apostolic authority and its sacramental character, it is not here that their most enduring legacy lies. That gift is to be found in their prayers and their poetry. It is when they are allusive that they are most revealing; it is when they are struggling with the paradoxes of the Christian faith that they are most sacramental. And this is emblematic of the sacred ambiguity that is the peculiar genius of *Anglo-Catholicism*. When, for example, George Herbert describes prayer, metaphor carries us where mere doctrine could not. Prayer, he writes, “is the Church’s banquet. . . .”

A kind of tune which all things hear and fear.
Softness and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse.
Exalted Manna, gladness of heart,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest.
“Prayer”

“Heaven in ordinarie”: Father Sloane is fond of reminding us that God is present in ordinary bread and very ordinary wine. Herbert asks us to take this sacramental insight one step further, to see God in the ordinariness of our daily lives and in the scandalous ordinariness of the tavern and gambling house that in Herbert’s day was called an ordinary. We may think that it is not the right place for God to be, that its denizens are not the right kind of people, and that theirs is certainly not the right kind of behavior. But God is there, as any good Anglo-Catholic should see. And what does this mean for us? Whither does our sacred ambiguity beckon? The twentieth-century Anglican poet R. S. Thomas offers an answer in “The Bright Field.”

I have seen the sun break through to illuminate a small field for a while, and gone my way and forgotten it. But that was the pearl of great price, the one field that had treasure in it. I realize now that I must give all that I have to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after an imagined past. It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush, to a brightness that seemed as transitory as your youth once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

Whither are we beckoned? To the field, the house, the man, the woman, the dream that we once passed by; there to open our eyes as Moses, Hooker, and Herbert have before us. And this is only the beginning; our adventure has just begun.

II. Apostolic Holiness

Anglo-Catholicism did not have an easy birth. From Henry VIII to Edward VI to Mary to Elizabeth and beyond, its life was fraught with peril as well as hope. But then incarnation, the mingling of spirit and flesh, is never easy. There is something inherently risky, even downright messy, about it. And yet light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. So here we stand with Richard Hooker, George Herbert, Jeremy Taylor, and R. S. Thomas, gazing at a field. Passersby think us mad, standing in silence at so ordinary a place. But we whose eyes have been liberated from the prison of easy answers and preconceived ideas know that before us lies the pearl of great price. And we know yet more; that everything ordinary is ablaze with the extraordinary, and that nothing will ever be the same: not us and not that field. It now stretches out endlessly before us, beckoning us to go further and further. To call this an adventure would be an understatement, for there is nothing quite as daring except falling in love. It is our particular journey, but we cannot take it alone. It is a mystery, yet it is strangely certain. And for all its wonder, it is also painfully fragile; as fragile as a babe in a manger or a man on a cross.

We should not be surprised, then, that in the seventeenth century, as in our own, the Anglo-Catholic vision was not always welcome or understood. The Puritans, with their love of system and theological precision, dismissed sacramentalism as popish mumbo jumbo. But lest we be too hard on the Puritans—and I love being hard on the Puritans—we must confess that even the Caroline divines mistook the mystery they had encountered. Sometimes, as Shakespeare might put it, they loved not wisely, but too well. They revered the Church, but were so awestruck by its mystery that they assumed that the Church as it was, was the Church as it ought to be. They revered the society in which the Church was embedded, but they were so aware of God's presence in the world around them that they assumed that the social and political order of their day was divinely ordained. And since both Church and State were governed by monarchs who aspired to rule by divine right, they became apologists for divine right.

What followed was tragic yet almost inevitable. When England was riven by civil war in 1642, the conflict between Charles I and the House of Commons was entangled in the conflict between the Church and its Puritan critics. The King's defeat in 1648 and his execution the following year meant the Church's defeat and dissolution. The Book of Common Prayer itself was proscribed, and, ironically, had it not been for colonial backwaters such as Virginia, Anglican worship might have disappeared beneath the flood of Calvinist biblicism. To be sure, after ten years of Cromwellian government, the monarchy was restored, as was the Church. But although the Church bore the outward marks of Anglican catholicity—the episcopate, the sacraments, and the Prayer Book—two things were missing: the passion that had brought the Caroline Church to the edge of God's field, and the vision to perceive the mystery that lay within it.

It is easy to understand why this should have been so. Religious passion, ill informed and misdirected, had divided the country and had nearly destroyed the Church. Neither the monarch nor the bishops nor the members of Parliament wanted to return to those dark days. Moreover, by the end of the seventeenth century, Europe was entering the age of Enlightenment, and as reason was divorced from faith and exalted for its own sake, mystery was consigned to the outer darkness. To borrow a phrase from Gertrude Stein, a

field was a field was a field. And so the Church embraced the course of safety rather than the road to sanctity. It made a virtue of respectability and a cult of outward conformity. Evidence of spiritual indifference was all too easy to find. By the eighteenth century, people were using fonts as umbrella stands. Farmers housed their livestock in chancels. Bishops ignored their dioceses and rarely entered their own cathedrals. As for public worship, it was notable for what Charles Kingsley called “its ghastly dullness.”

This religious lassitude was not universal. In thousands of parishes across the country, as well as in America, the gospel was preached, the sacraments faithfully administered, and the needy cared for. And there were protests against the prevailing spiritual climate. The eighteenth century was not only the age of Enlightenment, but the age of the Evangelical revival, a movement whose Catholic roots are too often ignored. How many Methodists, for example, know that John Wesley said the rosary? How many Methodists even know what a rosary is? But neither the quiet prayers of the country parson nor the Evangelical summons to repentance was enough to rouse the Church from its torpor. For that to happen, someone would have to directly challenge the Church’s subordination to the State and break the shackles that held sanctity hostage to propriety. And on 14 July 1833, John Keble threw down the gauntlet. He mounted the steps to the great university church of St. Mary the Virgin of Oxford, and there, before a privileged congregation that included His Majesty’s Judges of Assize, he pronounced the awful judgment of apostasy against the English state and nation.

Most of us know something about that momentous day and about the Oxford Movement from which this parish and the whole of modern Anglo-Catholicism spring. But we sometimes forget how visionary the Tractarians were. What we remember is that they were champions of sound doctrine, and this they certainly were. Even more than the Carolines, they emphasized the importance of baptismal grace and of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. But more than theological renewal, what they sought was a spiritual revolution: the total reordering of our individual and corporate lives. If God is holy, they taught, then his body, the Church must be holy, and so must each of its members. And it is only when we understand this, that we can understand why the Tractarians, and Anglo-Catholics ever since, have so vigorously defended one particularly arcane doctrine: the apostolic succession of bishops and the consequent necessity for episcopal ordination to the ministry.

The doctrine was not new, but most Anglican Catholics had not made much of it. The Caroline divines, for example, although they treasured the Church’s apostolic character and the historic episcopate, did not believe that the Church required an unbroken line of episcopal succession. Thus, Protestant clergyman from the continent did not have to be re-ordained to serve in the Church of England, although the same privilege was not extended to English Nonconformists. It was the sort of ambiguity with which Anglicans had become comfortable. But the Tractarians would have no part of it. They had seen too much ecclesiastical worldliness, and had experienced too much political interference, to allow anything that they thought would compromise the Church’s independence or its ministry. As John Henry Newman observed: “Mere political religion..., like a broken reed, has pierced the hand that leaned upon it.” And so the Tractarians insisted that the Church’s authority, its Catholic identity, and the validity of its sacraments depended upon a chain of episcopal ordinations stretching back to the apostles. But given the controversies surrounding holy orders in the Church today, we must remember that for the Tractarians, apostolic succession was not an end in itself. Otherwise, it would have been an empty formality. If you doubt this, all you need do is look at the dozens of tiny sects, some with only a handful of members, that clutter the ecclesiastical landscape with their claim to apostolic orders. Apostolic their orders may indeed be, but what most of these groups lack is what lay at the heart of the Tractarian vision: an apostolic ministry. And the work of an apostle is the work of holiness.

But what is holiness? We have already noted some of its characteristics. One of the most important is reverence: reverence for the Church, for Scripture, for reason and tradition, and reverence for the truth. Another is humility: the awareness that sacred truth is too vast for us to understand or for our words to

contain. And with reverence and humility comes awe: the sacramental wonder that looks at a field and sees the pearl of great price, that looks at bread and wine and sees God. But, as the Tractarians emphasized, to see the perfect for what it really is, means to see our imperfection for what it really is. The Tractarians were alarmed by the smug self-satisfaction with which the privileged contemplated their eternal destiny, and they were dismayed by what they regarded as the cheap grace that Evangelicals were dispensing to troubled hearts. They warned that however beautiful holiness may be, it is also demanding. If we are to do God's will, Keble explained, we must tame our own, and that requires discipline and obedience, sacrifice and penitence. It is little wonder, then, that the Tractarians insisted on the importance of sacramental confession.

All this may seem self-evident to Anglo-Catholics like ourselves, but before we nod our heads in agreement, we need to understand what the Tractarians would ask of us. They were not commending thrift, cleanliness, and the usual domestic virtues. Nor were they at all interested in the social virtues that promise wealth and influence. Indeed, just the opposite was the case. Newman spoke for them all when he complained: "I do not know anything more dreadful than

...that low ambition which sets every one on the lookout to succeed,...to amass money, to gain power, to depress his rivals, to triumph over his superiors,...an intense, sleepless, never-wearied, never-satisfied pursuit of Mammon." This was not what ambitious Oxonians wanted to hear in Newman's day, just as it is certainly not what ambitious Washingtonians want to hear in our own. And this subversive spirituality helps explain the fear that the Oxford Movement inspired in respectable Church circles.

Of course, it was not the only reason the Tractarians were unpopular. The most frequent complaint raised against them was that they constituted a Roman fifth column in the Anglican ranks. But beneath such doctrinal concerns, there lurked the fear that Anglo-Catholics were subverting the natural social order. When, for example, Protestants complained about sacramental confession, what seems to have most alarmed them was the danger that a priest might undermine the authority a husband or father. And given the Victorian cult of domesticity, the outrage that greeted the creation of the first religious orders for women was almost inevitable. Or consider how one Evangelical critic ridiculed the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. If baptism conveys new birth, he asked, why not give communion to infants, to the unconscious, or to idiots? To which the obvious Catholic answer is "Why not?" We do, in fact, give communion to children and to the retarded, and we do so because we are bound to them in Christ in ways too mysterious to say. Rightly understood, the Catholic faith liberates us from the presumption with which we divide the world into the deserving and the undeserving, the respectable and the disreputable. What our Evangelical critic thought was a clever *reductio ad absurdum* turns out to be a *reductio ad gloriam*.

Again and again, the Tractarians contrasted the narrowness of our hearts to the incarnate breadth of God's. Most passionate of all was Edward Bouverie Pusey. In a remarkable sermon, he reminded his congregation that God made the poor "the visible representatives to the rich of his Only Begotten Son who, 'being rich,' for us men and for our salvation, 'became poor,' who in their earthly lot exalted our human nature with his divine." You can forbid begging, Pusey observed. "The law can make it a crime to ask alms in the name of Jesus. It cannot do away with the presence of Jesus."

Do you see how far apostolic holiness can take us? We look at a field and see a pearl. We look at a beggar and see Christ. Wherever we turn, our Anglo-Catholic vision reveals some new and glorious mystery. This is the vision that inspired the Oxford Movement, and even those who did not join it could not help but be touched by it. Years later, Matthew Arnold—no Anglo-Catholic—recalled the wonder he felt listening to Newman:

Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon afternoon light through the aisles of St. Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were

religious music, subtle, sweet and mournful? I seem to hear him saying: “After the fever of life, after weariness and sickness, fightings and despondings, languor and fretfulness, struggling and succeeding; after all the changes and chances of this troubled and unhealthy state—at last comes death, at length the white throne of God, at length the beatific vision.”

What an extraordinary adventure our Anglo-Catholic journey has already been, and we are only half way through it!

III. Sacramental Engagement

We have traveled from the court of Henry VIII to the church of St. Mary the Virgin in Oxford. And as we have journeyed, our vision has grown wider as we have become more reverent, more humble, more prayerful, and, yes, more holy. Think of the places where we have seen God—in a field, in our neighbors, in a newly baptized baby, and in a beggar—places that, like the Blessed Sacrament, are astonishingly ordinary yet sacramentally extraordinary. It may even seem that our journey has reached its appointed end, as heaven above is revealed in earth below through the golden haze of an Anglican evensong. But we dare not stop here because something is wrong with this beautiful scene. It is not, as you might suspect, that Newman would soon be on his way to Rome. The problem lies with his words as an Anglican.

Ours, you will recall, is a sacramental faith that finds God in the midst of life. But Newman’s language, and that of other Tractarians, is strangely disembodied, as if life were a miasma to be dispelled, rather than a mystery to be sanctified. And this gloomy otherworldliness, so at odds with their incarnational theology, limited their influence and scared off would be admirers. Stewart Headlam, who would later wed Christian Socialism to Anglo-Catholicism, recalled his dismay when, as a student at Cambridge, he first heard Dr. Pusey preach. “All he talked about was death and the imminence of death,” Headlam wrote, “when what we wanted was life and the living of it more abundantly.” The poet William Johnson Cory put it this way:

You promise heaven free from strife,
 Pure truth, and perfect change of will'
 But sweet, sweet is this human life,
 So sweet I fain would breathe it still.
 Your chilly stars I can forgo,
 This warm kind world is all I know.
 “Mimnerus in Church”

There were, of course, good reasons for this spiritual austerity, the most urgent being the heedless self-indulgence of the privileged class from which the Tractarians themselves had come. Even so, their severity was often excessive and sometimes frightening. It also encouraged in them the tendency to be forever looking backwards. Frederick Denison Maurice, the Oxford Movement’s most perceptive critic, once observed that the Tractarians had been right to resist the spirit of their age. Where they erred, he argued, was in trying to resist it with the spirit of another age.

But the vision that had inspired the Tractarians could not be confined to the ethereal or the antiquarian. Armed with that vision, a new generation of Anglo-Catholics would embrace the world and seek to transform it. The age of sacramental engagement was dawning, and its first fruit would be a liturgical revolution more radical and more glorious than anything Anglicans had experienced since the days of the Reformation. The Tractarians, for all their sacramental devotion, had adhered to the liturgical custom of

their day, celebrating the Eucharist in cassock and surplice, often from the north side of the altar, as the Prayer Book rubrics required. But their ritualist offspring overturned these Protestant conventions. They demanded worship that would honor Christ's presence with solemn beauty and breathtaking splendor. They ransacked the Middle Ages, Victorian Roman Catholicism, and the mysteries of the Orthodox East, concocting liturgies that were often sublime, sometimes grotesque, and occasionally ridiculous. As one clever Protestant observed:

One by one, innovations came in due course,
 High Altars, bright brasses, great candles in force,
 Uplifting of arms most exceedingly high,
 Turning backs on the people as if they were shy.

.....
 There were chasubles white with the sign of the yoke,
 Albs, copes, capes, birettas, and volumes of smoke.

To us it sounds wonderful. But, as we have learned, Catholic vision is not always welcome nor is it always understood. Evangelicals, already convinced that Anglo-Catholics were papists in disguise, pounced on these ceremonial goings on as proof that they had been right all along. In some English parishes, the introduction of Catholic ritual sparked riots, the most notorious of which took place at St. George's-in-the-East in London. When violence proved ineffective, angry Protestants resorted to the courts, and some obdurate priests who refused to obey the courts or their own bishops were actually imprisoned. American ritualists were spared that fate, but they too were hounded by hostile bishops, one of whom—Manton Easturn of Massachusetts—denounced Anglo-Catholicism as the work of Satan and its advocates as “followers of the Scarlet Woman.” Yet the ritualists endured, in part because of the undeniable beauty of their worship, and in part because of the beauty of their holiness: two virtues that were intertwined in astonishing ways.

Their holiness was revealed in their serviced to the poor. Driven by their faith, and sometimes by their inability to find work elsewhere, ritualist clergy made their way into slum parishes where no one else would go. There they ministered to the destitute with a sacrificial love that earned the grudging respect of even their staunchest enemies. But, in these poverty-stricken parishes, something else happened. The same Anglo-Catholic clergy who had forged a ceremonial bond between matter and spirit, began to forge a sacramental bond between ceremonial and society, transforming what had been a liturgical revolution into a vehicle for social revolution.

This sacramental subversion had begun with the Tractarians. They had denounced the rapaciousness of the rich and the economic system that encouraged it. They had taught their fellow Christians to look for Christ in a beggar's face. But because they preferred the past to the present, they could not embrace the democratic and egalitarian movements that were stirring the people. Caught between their orthodox insight and their otherworldly pessimism, they could only propose returning to an imaginary golden age when rich and poor had lived in harmony under the watchful eye of a benevolent Church. But anyone familiar with industrial life knew that this was fantasy. And so the slum ritualists and their allies, being orthodox Christians, abandoned the Tractarians' idealized medievalism, and instead joined their parishioners in clamoring for social and political change. Not all these rebellious Anglo-Catholics were priests. Some were monks and nuns. Others were laypeople, like my wife's heroine, Felicia Skene, a novelist who dedicated her fortune and her literary skills to the causes of prison reform and the abolition of capital punishment. Whoever they were, in their hands Newman's beatific vision took on flesh and blood. Indeed, it became more radical with every passing year, so that by the century's end a growing chorus of Anglo-Catholics was

insisting that orthodox Christianity demanded nothing less than socialism. And at the head of the chorus was Stewart Headlam.

I devoted last year's Epiphany forum to Headlam and to the Anglo-Catholic social tradition, so I shall avoid the temptation to tell the story again. For that you can always read my wonderful book on the subject. But there are two points that we need to understand about Headlam and his comrades. The first is that however we may disagree with their politics, we dare not abandon their theological vision. If, as the Caroline divines taught, we are to revere the human family; if, as the Tractarians taught, we all share equally in baptismal grace; and if it is a mark of apostolic holiness to see God in the face of the poor, then anything that robs men and women of their dignity or condemns them to poverty is an offense against almighty God. To which Anglo-Catholic socialists would add a second point: anything that deprives men and women of beauty and delight is equally offensive to God, for in his sacramental kingdom there can be no justice without joy.

From the Caroline divines to our own day, Anglo-Catholics have been drawn to the arts. The mingling of the tangible and the intangible, the artist's love of mystery and ambiguity: these things are second nature to us. They lie at the heart of our worship, as the ritualists understood. But Headlam and his friends went further, reminding Anglo-Catholics that they should not treat liturgy as a personal indulgence or as a pious escape from the dreariness of life, when it is instead the sacrament of God's purpose for the whole of life. Just as you would not dream of locking up God's love in a sanctuary, they argued, neither should you try to confine his beauty. Headlam insisted that God's grace abounds wherever there is art: on the stage and in the gallery, in the concert hall and even in the music hall. And if we would be orthodox—if we would give God his rightful glory—we must acknowledge his grace and allow it to shine on the poor and the brokenhearted so that we we, with them, might be renewed and transformed. As Headlam once observed, it is all well and good for wealthy Christians to teach the poor their catechism. But the rich might do better to learn the catechism themselves and then teach the poor to dance.

Of course, to engage the arts is to engage artists, and that is not always easy. The age of Donne and Herbert is long past, and modern artists are more likely to be skeptics than they are to be Christians. This was as true at the turn of the last century as it is today, but our radical forbears did not lose heart. Convinced that all beauty is inspired by God, they counseled patience. Listen to artists, they said, gaze at whatever fields they show you until you see God, and when you do, ask the artists to join you in worshipping him. If the Church would show itself to be a loving mother of beauty, Headlam argued, the men and women who create that beauty would come home and we, in turn, would be doubly blessed. Some artists did, in fact, find their home in the Church. But many more did not, among them Matthew Arnold. Entranced though he was by Newman, he could not himself believe, and in "Dover Beach," he gave voice to the doubt that for more than a century has haunted our culture. "The Sea of Faith," he wrote:

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

How can we engage such despair? The Tractarians regarded the task as impossible. They were familiar with doubt; Newman seems to have wrestled with it much of his life. But they believed that to yield to it was a moral failing that demanded penitence, not understanding. Thus, when Annie Besant, who would later earn fame as a secularist, a socialist, and then as a theosophist and a champion of Indian

independence, traveled to Oxford to speak to Pusey about her religious doubts, the aging scholar angrily dismissed her concerns. "It is not your duty to entertain truth," he scolded. "It is your duty to accept and believe the truth as laid down by the Church." Needless to say, such advice satisfied neither Besant nor her fellow skeptics. Indeed, as the Victorian age drew to a close, their questions were becoming more insistent and more alarming.

As biblical scholars amassed evidence that the Scriptures were the product of centuries of development and mythological elaboration, historians were exposing what seemed to be the equally tangled development of doctrine. And beneath it all was the protean tumult of evolution. We, being the sophisticated people we are, have never looked upon Genesis as a textbook in human origins, and so we are apt to miss the real challenge that evolution presents. If, as some evolutionary theorists argue, the cosmos is caught up in a blind torrent of change, there can be no privileged moment that bestows meaning on the rest. Our Anglo-Catholic vision would be but one of many, all of them doomed to extinction in the relentless flow of transmutation.

But there was a way between Tractarian resistance and cynical despair. In 1889, Charles Gore and a group of friends published a collection of essays whose very title breathes Epiphany hope: *Lux Mundi*, the light of the world. And it is to that light that we now must travel, bearing with us our own doubts and darkness.

IV. Radical Fidelity

The story of Anglo-Catholicism is a saga filled with dangers and delights, none more astonishing than those we have just encountered. From the serenity of an Oxford evensong we were plunged into riots over ritual, made our way into the slums, raised the banner of social revolution, and then found ourselves on the music-hall stage. Every step brought new perils, yet it was from these perils that our vision took on flesh and blood. This, indeed, is how Catholic truth must grow, for its pattern is the incarnation, and the incarnation, you will recall—the mingling of heaven and earth from which redemption springs and God's glory is revealed—is nothing if it is not risky. But just as we were about to join what Christopher Smart called "the chorus stupendous," we were transported to Dover Beach where we heard only faith's "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar." And the sacramental world that seemed so close disappeared behind a cloud of biblical criticism, evolutionary theory, and historical doubt. "Ah, love," Arnold concludes,

... let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

This is the voice of modernity, a voice that is more troubled today than it has ever been. No longer do we simply doubt the existence of God; we doubt the existence of truth. Not only do we deny the meaning of Scripture; we deny the meaning of life. Skepticism has given way to a cynicism so profound, that some Anglicans have holed themselves up in a theological fortress from which they fire salvos at everything they do not like. As we have seen, there were times when the Tractarians yielded to the same temptation. But

on this point, at least, we dare not follow their example. We can no more turn back the tide of critical scholarship than Canute could turn back the sea. Even if we could, to do so would be neither Catholic nor Anglican. We are a sacramental people, and as such we must be engaged in the life and thought of our times. If we can find God in the slums and reveal him to the world, we can find God in our disordered culture and show forth his hidden glory.

But how are we to do so? Not, as some would have it, by surrendering to the culture. We could, of course, treat the Bible as mere literature and the creeds as “historical documents” to be safely packed away in small print at the back of the Prayer Book so that no one will read them. We could reduce Christianity to a religion of good manners and saccharine sentiments. But that would only recreate the vapid religion that led the Church to the edge of disaster in the eighteenth century, a religion utterly at odds with the sacramental wonder we experience every day of our lives. For us, to engage the culture is to wrestle with it, and it is just this sort of wrestling that Charles Gore and his collaborators undertook in writing *Lux Mundi*, a volume that bore the telling subtitle, *A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*.

What these young Anglo-Catholic scholars argued is that orthodox Christianity does not rest on the infallibility of Scripture or even on the infallibility of dogma. Rather, its foundation is the truth found in the incarnate presence of the living Christ as it is received and verified by the ongoing experience of his body, the Church. Aubrey Moore, one of the most gifted *Lux Mundi* writers, explained this in an essay on the Christian doctrine of God we would do well to ponder as we struggle with some of our current ecclesiastical disputes. Moore noted that many Christians feared truths that seemed to challenge the authority of Scripture. But, he argued, “an intelligent Christian will not ask ‘Does this new truth agree with our contradict the letter of the Bible?’ but ‘How does it interpret and help us to understand the Bible? And so with the regard to *all* truth,” Moore continued, “[the Christian] adopts neither the method of protest nor the method of surrender, but the method of assimilation. In the face of new discoveries, the only question he is anxious to answer is this, ‘What old truth will they explain, or enlighten, or make real for us? What is this new world of life and interest which is awaiting its consecration?’”

Illumined by this approach, Moore and the other essayists were able to claim for Catholic Christianity the theory of evolution, the development of doctrine, and some of the most perplexing results of biblical criticism. Many educated Christians, for example, had been troubled by evidence that the 110th Psalm had not been written by David, even though our Lord had attributed it to him. Conservative Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals insisted that it was the biblical scholars who were mistaken, for Jesus could not have been. But Charles Gore, like Moore, was able to join truth to truth. He argued that when Christ assumed our humanity, he emptied himself of his supernatural knowledge. Indeed, it was only in becoming a man of his own age, that Christ could be a man for all ages. Much as Hooker turned the politically imposed ambiguity of the sixteenth century into a vehicle for sacramental devotion, Gore used the skepticism of the nineteenth century as a doorway into the mystery of the incarnation. And in so doing, he reconsecrated humility as a cardinal Anglo-Catholic virtue.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Anglo-Catholics seemed poised to usher in a spiritual renaissance in the Anglican communion. They had renewed the Church’s worship, battled injustice, embraced the arts, and had snatched hope from the jaws of despair. As one historian wrote: “The Anglo-Catholics had won. They had out-thought, out-lived, and out-suffered all their opponents.” When the faithful gathered in London in 1933 to mark the centenary of the Oxford Movement, 50,000 people attended the great Thanksgiving Mass. 10,000 more attended a similar serviced in Philadelphia. But today, with the exception of congregations like the one here present, it seems that the spirit of the Lord has departed from us. Ours has become a community of polemics rather than thought, of moral pieties rather than bold living, of endless complaining rather than Christ-like suffering.

If someone were to ask how we had come to this impasse, many of us would likely blame those two hot-button issues, the ordination of women and the ordination of Gene Robinson. “If only the Church had stayed the same,” some would argue, “everything would be just fine.” To which others would reply, “If only you had embraced change, everything would be fine.” As many of you know, I myself have very strong opinions about these matters. But important though the issues are—and inspired though my opinions may be—these controversies are not the cause of our malaise. Anglo-Catholicism had been ailing long before they were ever raised. It was amidst the 1933 festivities that the distinguished lay theologian Maurice Reckitt complained that Anglo-Catholics were abandoning mission for self-absorption. Should they continue on that path, he warned, they would have no second centennial to celebrate.

But how could a movement so blessed lose its way? The answer, I think, lies in a double paradox: Anglo-Catholics were the victims of their own success and victims of a success they never had. Anglo-Catholics had certainly won many of their battles. Bishops no longer hounded them, mobs no longer pursued them, and Evangelicals no longer prosecuted them. More important, their theological language had become the common discourse of Anglicanism. Nearly everyone, it now seemed, acknowledged the importance of apostolic succession, baptismal regeneration, and Christ’s eucharistic presence. As for Catholic ritual, it was everywhere, along with its sartorial accouterments: surpliced choirs, chasubled celebrants, and mitred bishops. But as often happens, victory fostered complacency. Once it took its place as an honored part of the establishment, Anglo-Catholicism’s rebellious spirit was quickly domesticated. Charisma gave way to bureaucracy, ritual was ritualized, and passion was replaced by good taste.

Anglo-Catholics were not alone in suffering a loss of vision, but because of their history of strained relations with their fellow Anglicans, the danger for them was far greater. To understand this, we must go back to the days of persecution. Victorian Anglo-Catholics had hailed their bishops as successors to the apostles. But many bishops did not know what to make of this honor and were hostile to those who bestowed it. The Tractarians had recalled the Church to the heritage of its seventeenth-century divines—to Andrewes, Herbert, and Donne—but the Church would not come. And so, rejected by the Church they revered, Anglo-Catholics developed an odd parochial life that would be best described as Catholic congregationalism. Parish priests constructed liturgies, defined doctrine, and issued anathema with a theatrical disregard for both the Prayer Book and their bishops. And when, at last, Anglo-Catholics triumphed over their persecutors, this strange ecclesiastical culture endured because—and this is the second part of our paradox—the Anglo-Catholic victory was not what it seemed to be.

The Carolines, the Tractarians, and the Christian Socialists had all dreamed of a Church whose inner life and mission to the world would be imbued with sacramental wonder. But what Anglo-Catholics finally achieved was only toleration for that wonder. Anglicans of all stripes might adopt Catholic language and ritual, but they were much less interested in the radical vision from which these things sprang. Thus, in many places, Anglo-Catholics remained a church within the Church, and as their own vision faded, their sectarian identity, recognizable by the use of arcane language and the mastery of ceremonial minutiae, became more intense. Much of the Anglo-Catholic world became obsessively insular, more concerned with devotional “bric-a-brac” than it was with responding to the needs of the society around it. Doctrines, such as apostolic succession, that had once carried the promise of spiritual challenge and intellectual adventure were reduced to mere shibboleths, as the hysteria over the creation of the Church of South India made painfully clear.

In 1947 Anglicans in southern India joined with Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists to form a united Church. Many Anglicans responded cautiously to this daring venture, and with good reason, for the new Church did not require its clergy to receive apostolic orders until a thirty-year grace period had expired. But in some Anglo-Catholic circles, criticism of the scheme was ludicrously self-indulgent. The vicar of St. Mary’s, Cable Street in East London, for example—a church attended by only a handful of its parishioners—affixed a large poster on the front door that announced to his utterly indifferent neighbors:

“This church is not in communion with the Church of South India.” Perhaps he hoped that his unchurched parishioners would be so inspired by his gesture that among them the thought would take root: “You know, I’ve never so much as entered St. Mary’s. But now that they’re not in communion with the Church of South India, I simply have to go to Mass.” If this was the vicar’s hope, he must have been bitterly disappointed,

Given the spiritual miasma that had descended upon Anglo-Catholicism, and the antiquarian nostalgia that accompanied it, we should not be surprised that when, in our own day, the tide of change flooded over the Church—the ordination of women and the ordination of homosexuals presenting the most difficult challenges—many Anglo-Catholics were unprepared. Polemics flew from left and right, but prayerful conversation was in woefully short supply. So appalling was the level of theological discourse that, in 1988, Kenneth Leech, one of the most imaginative Anglo-Catholic theologians in the Church of England, concluded that “Anglo-Catholicism is an exhausted tradition from which no further creative developments can be expected.” Yet amidst the gloom and foreboding, here we all are at St. Paul’s, very much alive, while beyond our doors is a world in need of what we have found—wonder, forgiveness, hope, and love—in short, a world in need of God. The question for us is not how can we survive, but rather how can it be that these, our neighbors, are not Anglo-Catholics, and how can it be that Anglo-Catholics are at such loggerheads when there are precious souls to be won?

When our journey began I remarked that we would travel to the future by way of the past. Now the future beckons. What gifts from the past will sustain us on our way? From the Carolines we have the gift of sacramental wonder that sees “heaven in ordinarie,” the gift of humility before a truth that we can never possess yet which lovingly possesses us, and the gift of reverence for a Church we did not make and whose communion we cannot break. From Richard Hooker we take our compass: the never-ending conversation between Scripture, reason, and tradition of which we are a part. The Tractarians have graced us with the resolve to seek sanctity rather than respectability. From them we have learned to cherish apostolic order as the school of apostolic holiness, remembering that an essential mark of holiness is to see Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters. From the ritualists and Christian Socialists we take the gift of sacramental engagement, following Christ into the slums and onto the stage, defending the outcast and embracing beauty. And with the authors of *Lux Mundi* we carry the light of the world with the gracious orthodoxy that welcomes all truth in Christ who is all truth; the orthodoxy that sends us from worship to break the bonds of those who sit in darkness.

It is our radical fidelity to these gifts that defines us as Anglo-Catholics. Great and unexpected wonders await us, as do perils. But that is the nature of an adventure, that is the nature of Anglo-Catholicism, and that is the nature of God. As the fourth-century theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, observed, God is like a spring bubbling out of the earth.

As you came near the spring you would marvel, seeing that the water was endless, as it continually gushed up and poured forth. Yet you could never say that you had seen all the water. How could you see what was still hidden in the bosom of the earth? Hence no matter how long you might stay at the spring you would always be beginning to see the water. For the water never stops flowing, and it is always beginning to bubble up again. It is the same with one who fixes his gaze on the infinite beauty of God. It is constantly being discovered anew, and it is always seen as something new and strange in comparison with what the mind has already understood. And as God continues to reveal himself, man continues to wonder; and he never exhausts his desire to see more, since what he is waiting for is always more magnificent, more divine, than all he has already seen.

What, then, are we waiting for? There is no better time to set sail than today. May God bless us on our journey and bring us with our fathers and mothers in the faith, with saints and sinners, prostitutes and poets, into his glorious kingdom.