

## Introduction to Church History

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### The Church in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

#### Background Factors/Events

1. **The French Revolution (1789)**
2. **Romanticism:** See works of Thomas Carlyle, Walter Scott and, in time, through the art of the Pre-raphaelites.
3. **The Industrial Revolution:**

#### Religion and Politics: the age of Reform and Social Transformation

Repeal of the Corporation Act (1661) and Test Act (1673) – led to non-conformists and Roman Catholics entering public life.

Abolition of the Slave Trade – 80% of national income. William Wilberforce led to abolition of Slave Trade (1807) and in 1833 it became illegal to have a slave.

Tithes: the Church had the right to levy a 10% tithe on all agricultural produce. Source of local income to the incumbent: varied from parish to parish. Wealthy livings meant incumbents could appoint a team of curates to do the work for them.

Expansion of the cities: led to need for new parishes and new church buildings. Waterloo churches: parliament funded church building in 1818 and 1824. Church-building continued apace throughout the century.

#### Tractarianism and Anglo-catholicism

##### ***Early History: the Oxford Movement***

Beginning dated to John Keble preaching his *assize sermon* at Oxford University in 1833 called, *A National Apostasy*.

*From the start, Anglo-Catholicism has been about the spiritual authority and vocation of the Church of God, especially as applied to the Anglican Church.*

Early Tractarians/Oxford Movement included:

- John Henry Newman
- Edward Bouvarie Pusey
- Frederick William Faber

Emphasising the continuity of the catholic identity of the Church of England.

This 'reforming' ecclesiology was contained in a series of 90 'Tracts for the Times', published in Oxford and widely-read. The Oxford Movement leaders became known as 'Tractarians'.

*For the leaders of the Oxford Movement, a new stress on Catholicity was the only antidote to erastianism, spiritual bankruptcy and the erosive effects of post-enlightenment liberalism.*

Things came to a head when John Henry Newman published 'Tract 90' in 1840, which argued that the doctrine of the Church of England, enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer and the 39 Articles, was essentially the same as that of the Roman Catholic Church. In the wake of the Gorham Controversy (1850), where a state court (the Privy Council) had overturned a judgement by the bishops and the ecclesiastical courts over the nature of the Church of England's doctrine. Those who left included Henry Manning (who became the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster) and F.W. Faber.

## ***Anglo-Catholicism and the Ritualist Controversy***

The second phase of the movement, a new generation of younger clergy came through who sought to see holiness worked out through more ornate and beautiful worship, including a heightened sense of ceremonial. Many had half an eye on the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, wanting to emulate the ceremonial, whilst using the text of the BCP. They introduced things like:

- Candles on the table
- Eastward facing presidency
- Singing of the liturgy (outside cathedrals this was rare)

Tended to take place in poorly-endowed livings:

- Processions
- Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament
- Incense
- Roman Vestments (cottas, albs, stoles, chasubles, birettas)
- Unleavened bread in communion
- Making the sign of the cross

This was reported in the press, and a number of riots and disruptions occurred, engineered by anti-Catholic agitators.

*Evangelicals began organised prosecutions of ritualist priests through the courts.* The priests did not believe the secular courts possessed any spiritual authority in such matters, so as they were often successfully prosecuted, they regarded this as martyrdom.

Godliness and self-sacrifice of the 'slum-priests': between 1876-1880, three urban priests were prosecuted and imprisoned for ritualistic practices.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century moved into the 20<sup>th</sup>, there was a growing distaste by the wider church for

persecuting people who ritually departed from the BCP (although many Evangelicals continued to persecute with zeal). Anglo-Catholicism was an increasingly powerful spiritual influence, whereas Evangelicalism was steadily declining.

*As a result, the Church of England in the 20<sup>th</sup> century generally has felt disinclined to use Canon Law (or the law of the land) to hound those who liturgically deviate from the 'legal' line of the Church of England on liturgy – especially when such liturgical creativity is coupled with spiritual growth and dynamism.*

So, the Anglo-Catholic ritualists were the pioneers of liturgical freedom (and anarchy) in the Church of England!

## Missionary Work

Colonialism opened way for missionary expansion, particularly successful in Africa.

The call to become a missionary was a major influence, particularly amongst evangelicals.

The export of denominationalism. (See reading project.)

## Science vs Religion

Early skirmishes: Galileo (1633)

Bishop James Ussher in 1648 dated the Creation to 4004BC.

Geology: dating of rocks led to different (much longer) chronology and also testing of the 6-day hypothesis.

Charles Darwin: (1809 – 1882) Theory of evolution developed between late 1830s and the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859). The 1860s became a period of heated debate. T.H. Huxley first to be explicit about link between humanity and apes – founder of “agnosticism” as a religious position, based on the absence of evidence. The Oxford Debate between Huxley and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford.

Three possible positions on science and religion emerged:

- Biblical literalism (believe the Bible and everything else needs to be adjusted);
- Integrate the Bible into the emerging scientific picture (with varying degrees of success);
- Abandon the Bible as a scientific source, retaining it for theology and ethics

This came to a head with the publication, in 1860, of the book *Essays and Reviews*, which caused a storm over its approach to the Bible and Biblical authority and led to a trial for heresy (highly unusual for those days!)

## The Second Coming

Conferences on biblical prophecy: Albury (1826-1830) and Powerscourt (1831-1833). Focus on Daniel and Revelation, in particular. Believed to predict the, as yet, unfulfilled future.

Powerscourt was attended by J.N. Darby (1800 – 1882), initially an Anglican minister, then founder

of the Plymouth Brethren. He developed a form of *pre-millennialism* called *dispensationalism*. Also invented the idea of the *rapture* – living Christians will meet Christ in the sky before a period of terrible tribulation for the world. After destruction of the Beast of Revelation, they will return with Christ to reign for 1000 years. Then will come the raising of the dead, the last judgement and heaven and hell for all eternity. This scheme was implemented in the *Schofield Chain-Reference Bible*, published in America and extensively bought. Dispensationalism then spread beyond Plymouth Brethren throughout America and, back, to the UK in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.