

# Evangelicals, Anglicans and Ritualism in Victorian England

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*It is difficult today, with Liberal Catholic ascendancy in the Church of England, to imagine the shock which the advent of the Tractarian Movement caused in Protestant England in the early part of the nineteenth century. While High and Low Churchmen as well as Evangelicals differed considerably in their precise understanding of the formularies of the Church, they were nevertheless agreed in their Protestantism. The more perceptive soon realised that Tractarianism was no mere chimera and dire predictions of where the doctrinal stance of the early leaders would end were confirmed by the publication of Tract 90 by Newman.\* Dr Scotland's article deals with the second phase which moved logically from doctrine to liturgical practice. The response of the Protestants was varied. Because of the revisionist rewriting of history by the Tractarians, the Parker Society published the writings of the sixteenth-century Reformers to confirm that the Church of England had been truly reformed. While these publications served a valuable purpose they did not stem the tide of liturgical revision towards Rome and eventually, in desperation, Protestants banded together in a large number of Societies of which Church Association was but one. Considerable intolerance was shown by both sides in the long-running dispute and each brought the other before the courts of the land.*

The English Church in medieval times had of course been part of the Western Roman Catholic Church presided over by the papacy. English worship in that era before the Reformation was characterized by a good deal of ritual centred on the mass and the sacramental system. In addition there were many monastic houses with their daily rounds of processional services and sung offices which contributed to the development of ceremonial. Much of this heritage was eradicated by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers in their desire to recover a simpler way of religious life and worship more in keeping with the New Testament and early church practices. For the most part English church worship remained plain and unadorned until the middle years of the nineteenth century, when a series of events combined to create a renewed desire to recover medieval ritual in the Church of England.

\* See 'Newman's Doctrine – Development or Deviation?' *Churchman* vol 106/1 1992.

## The Emergence of Ritualism in the Church of England in the Nineteenth Century

The impetus towards ritualism in the nineteenth century came from the second generation of the Oxford Movement. The first phase of Tractarianism from 1833-41 had been purely concerned with doctrinal issues. In particular, Tractarians had been concerned to argue that the Church of England was part of the one true Catholic Church and that through the hands of an unbroken line of bishops the apostolic succession could trace its roots back to the original apostolic community. Despite this strong doctrine of the church as the divine society there had been no ritual accompaniments in the worship of the first phase of the Movement. In fact until the time he left the Church of England in 1845 Newman wore a plain black gown for preaching and celebrated Holy Communion standing at the north end of the communion table. Pusey likewise was in this early phase against what he termed 'provocative trappings' and 'popish toys'.

### Emphasis on the Undivided Catholic Church of the First Five Catholic Centuries

A number of factors led the second generation of the Oxford Movement to adopt ritualistic practices. First and most basic was their emphasis on the undivided Catholic Church of the first five catholic centuries. The first generation leaders of the Movement, and Newman in particular, had looked back to what they termed the *via media* or middle position which had characterized the undivided Catholic Church of these first Christian centuries. Newman contended in Tracts 38 and 41 that in this era the Church was neither Roman on the one hand nor Protestant on the other. As the Tractarians studied the life and worship of this period of church history they found many doctrines and practices which Protestant bishops had removed on biblical grounds at the time of the Reformation. These included, for example, regular fasting, prayers for the dead, prayers to the saints, the veneration of Mary, an emphasis on virginity (celibacy), monastic communities, a belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the idea that the bread and wine changed in substance when the priest called the Holy Spirit down on them. All of these practices were of course precluded by the Thirty-nine Articles.

### Ritualism Arose out of a Desire to Reach the Poor

Second, there was a missionary motive behind the desire for increased ritual. Robert Linklater, a ritualist who worked for eleven years in London's East End in the parish of St Peter's-in-the-East, wrote of the murky atmosphere of fog and dust which pervaded the narrow alleys and courtyards of his pastoral charge. The children were, in his words, half-

naked, 'many of them stunted... deformed and sickly-looking.'<sup>1</sup> In such an atmosphere it was felt by Tractarians that the unemotional, arid services of low church Protestantism would never touch the poor. Indeed Bishop Blomfield described the average church service of the 1850s as being 'blank, dismal, oppressive and dreary'. 'Matins and the litany,' he continued, 'with a sermon lasting the best part of an hour, in a cold gloomy church, was not the kind of worship to appeal to a man or woman with no education or little imagination.'<sup>2</sup> The Tractarians therefore determined to reach the people for whom dull grey buildings had little appeal with 'mystery, movement, colour and ceremonial'.

### **The Romantic Movement**

This desire for colour and movement was further reinforced by the Romantic Movement which had captivated Victorian England. It looked back with warmth and esteem to the 'Merrie England' of the medieval period, and manifested itself in the arts, literature and architecture. The romantic ideal was a reaction to the growing emphasis on nationalism, scientific discovery and cold logic. In literature it was seen in the novels of Sir Walter Scott; in painting it was most visible in the Pre-Raphaelite School which sought to recover the insights of the medieval artists before Raphael. In architecture it was everywhere apparent in the growing taste for medieval Gothic style buildings.

### **The Camden Society**

Partly influenced by this romantic movement was the Cambridge Camden Society named after the antiquarian William Camden (1551-1623). It began in 1837 as the Ecclesiological Society started by John Mason Neale (1818-66) and a small circle of associates, most of whom were undergraduates who enjoyed visiting and studying old churches. It was formally founded in 1839 with the following aim: 'to promote the study of Gothic Architecture and Ritual Arts and the restoration of mutilated architectural remains'. The Camden Society sought to ensure that all new churches were erected in the Gothic style and that all restorations were carried out after the pattern of medieval buildings. The Society kept lists of specially approved architects. Among them were Sir Gilbert Scott (1811-78), William Butterfield (1814-1900) and Augustus Pugin (1812-52). The latter had such an enthusiasm for Gothic that on one occasion his friends presented him with a Gothic pudding!<sup>3</sup>

1 G Rowell *The Vision Glorious* (Oxford: OUP 1983) p 117

2 J R H Moorman *History of the Church in England* (A and C Black 1963) p 367

3 Butterfield was the first advocate of the Gothic style which he argued for in his book *Contrasts or A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day: Showing the Present Decay of Taste* (1836). It was not until 1847 that the society organized its ideas on restoration and the result was a tract on *Principles of Church Restoration* by E A Freeman. Later in 1850 Gilbert Scott published *Plea for the Faithful Restoration of Our Ancient Churches*.

### **The Middle and Upper Middle-class Taste for Ritualism**

In the fashionable suburbs which were springing up on the outskirts of many towns and cities there was a growing taste for more elaborate housing. Doorsteps and hallways were frequently laid with brightly coloured tiles. The upper-class Victorian drawing room was often ornate and rich in rugs, hangings and furniture. In areas such as Kensington, Chelsea or Brighton ritualism represented a transference of the Victorian house into the context of the church building. As Owen Chadwick put it: '...it was natural that the religious sentiment should desire to ornament churches in conformity with the better tastes of the generation.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Religious Orders**

In the later years of the nineteenth century the second generation of the Oxford Movement encouraged the re-founding of religious orders and the need arose for devotional offices which were beyond the scope of the Prayer Book services. Monks and nuns and other members of religious communities felt the need for stillness, quiet and contemplation. It was in the context of the newly formed religious houses that the doctrine of the real presence and the practice of reservation and benediction began to develop.

### **The Ornaments' Rubric**

The ritualists were further encouraged by the 'Ornaments' Rubric'. This was printed with the Preface to the 1559 prayer book and was retained in the front of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. The rubric stated explicitly that: 'Such Ornaments of the Church, and of the ministers thereof, at all Times of their ministration shall be retained, and be in use, as were in this Church of England, by the Authority of Parliament, in the Second Year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth.' Thus the ritualists sought to maintain that they were simply adhering to the original regulation and that it was perfectly legal to wear 'a white alb plain with vestment or cope and to celebrate', not at the north side of the table, but 'afore the midst of the altar' as specified in the *Book of Common Prayer* immediately before the Prayer of Consecration. At this level it was quite hard to take action against the ritualists. They argued for example that vestments, far from being illegal, were the only legal form of dress at Communion. However, it should be noted that in the trial of John Purchas for ritualistic innovations in 1870 the use of this rubric to justify ritualistic practice was brought to an end. This was done on the basis of the Act of Uniformity which, whilst it sanctioned the rubric of 1549, also added the words 'until other order shall be therein taken by authority of the Queen's majesty'. 'Such order,' it was argued, had been taken because in 1566 Archbishop Parker had issued *Advertisements* which condemned all vestments but the surplice. Although

4 O Chadwick *The Victorian Church* Part 2 (A and C Black 1967) p 310

Elizabeth I did not actually sign the bill, she clearly assented to its provisions because the use of vestments in the mass entirely disappeared. It is perhaps worth noting at this point that the number of ritualistic churches in England was not large. The main concentration was in the south and in London in particular. In 1882, out of 903 churches in London, 37 had vestments, 10 used incense, 45 had candles on the 'altar' and 270 used the eastward position for the celebrant at communion.<sup>5</sup>

## Evangelical Anglican Opposition to Ritualism

There were a number of aspects of Victorian ritualism to which Anglican Evangelicals took particular exception. Prominent among them were the doctrine of the real presence in the Eucharist, the use of wafer bread, mixing water and wine in the chalice during the service, reservation, adoration, benediction, the eastward position of the celebrant, and the wearing of vestments including albs, chasubles and coloured stoles. Priestly absolution, and in particular making the sign of the cross during it, the use of confessionals and bowing at the name of Jesus were all also particularly offensive to Evangelicals. It is the purpose of this article to consider some of these in more specific detail and to identify the nature and reasons for evangelical opposition to them.

### The Real Presence

In 1833 the Tractarians, although not laying the charge explicitly against Evangelicals, found the Eucharist a widely neglected ordinance. In fact it was almost an optional adjunct to normal Anglican worship. As they studied the early Catholic Fathers of the undivided church however, they found the Eucharist to have been a much more central form of Christian worship. They discovered a clear doctrine of a 'real presence' taught by Cyril of Jerusalem in his Catechetical Lectures. In a celebrated sermon preached in 1843 entitled 'The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent', Pusey spoke of 'that bread which is his flesh' and of 'touching with our very lips the cleansing blood'.

This doctrine which Pusey enunciated was clearly taught in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, an avowedly Anglo-Catholic collection, which was first published in 1861 under the editorial direction of John Mason Neale. Of a total of 273 hymns in the first edition 187 were, according to the Church Association, 'taken from Roman Catholic Breviaries, Missals and other Roman Catholic sources'. These verses from hymn 309 clearly adumbrated the real presence:

5 O Chadwick *The Victorian Church* Part 2 (A and C Black 1967) p 319

## Churchman

That last night, at supper lying  
'Mid the Twelve, His chosen band,  
JESUS, with the law complying,  
Keeps the feast its rites demand;  
Then, more precious Food supplying,  
Gives Himself with His own Hand.

WORD-made-Flesh true bread He maketh  
By His Word His Flesh to be;  
Wine His Blood; which whoso taketh  
Must from carnal thoughts be free;  
Faith alone, though sight forsaketh,  
Shows true hearts the mystery.

Therefore we, before Him bending,  
This great Sacrament revere;  
Types and shadows have their ending,  
For the newer rite is here;  
Faith, our outward sense befriending,  
Makes our inward vision clear.

Commenting on this hymn, the Rev James Ormiston, Vicar of Old Hill, near Dudley, wrote: 'Is not its presence as a communion hymn... conclusive evidence that the hymnal inculcates the great central error of the great apostasy. Our Church having plainly protested in Article XXVIII against the figment of any change in the bread and wine, it is inexplicable how this contravention of its authority should be allowed.'

Anglican Evangelicals took their stand against the real presence on the argument set out by Cranmer in the *Book of Common Prayer* that Christ's local bodily presence was not on earth but in heaven. William Goode in *The Nature of Christ's Presence* made two points against the Tractarian doctrine of the real presence.

- 1 The doctrine in question is opposed to the testimony of Scripture as to Christ's departure from the world, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father until the end of the world.
- 2 Christ's body, being a human body, cannot be present in more than one place at the same time.

Goode's conclusion on the matter of the presence was that: 'The Fathers, generally, did not hold that the risen Body and Blood of Christ in any form are so joined to the consecrated bread and wine, or so exist under their forms, that they are received into the mouths of the

communicants.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Bickersteth, Bishop of Ripon, declared that the doctrine of the real presence was 'not maintained in the Articles or formularies of the Church of England, nor can it be held consistently with these standards of belief'.<sup>7</sup> The first Bishop of Liverpool, the evangelical John Charles Ryle,<sup>8</sup> also took a stand against the doctrine of the 'real presence'. In his address to the seventh Liverpool Diocesan Conference in November 1898 he declared:

Our Reformers found the doctrine of a real corporal presence in our Church, and laid down their lives to oppose it. They would not even allow the expression 'real presence' a place in our Prayer Book. They distinctly repudiated alike both Romish transubstantiation and Lutheran consubstantiation. They declared in their 29th Article that faithless communicants are 'in no wise (*nullo modo*) partakers of Christ'. The extreme Ritualists have re-introduced the doctrine, and too often honour the consecrated elements in the Lord's Supper as if Christ's natural body and blood were in them.<sup>9</sup>

### **Reservation and Adoration**

Reservation and adoration, or the custom of retaining and storing some of the bread and wine from the Holy Communion, was re-introduced by the second generation Tractarians. Reservation was a common practice in medieval times but was halted by Cranmer and the Protestant Reformers. This is made clear by the sixth rubric at the end of the 1662 Prayer Book order of service which stated categorically: '...if any remain of that which was consecrated... the Priest and such other of the Communicants as he shall then call unto him, shall, immediately after the Blessing, reverently eat and drink the same.'

Some Tractarian ritualists first argued the need for reservation during the great cholera epidemics. When people were dying suddenly in large numbers it was not possible, so it was said, to consecrate bread and wine for each person who needed it. Instead, sufficient quantities would be set aside after the church service for the use of the sick and dying in the coming week. Notwithstanding this fact, reservation was viewed with disfavour because it could so quickly lead on to the concomitant practices of adoration and benediction.

6 W Goode *The Nature of Christ's Presence* vol 1 (1856) p 201

7 M C Bickersteth *A Sketch of the Life and Episcopate of the Right Reverend Robert Bickersteth DD Bishop of Ripon 1857-1884* (London: Rivingtons 1887) p 211

8 Bishop Ryle became the first bishop of Liverpool in 1880. Before that time he had written many Church Association tracts against ritualism.

9 J C Ryle *Charges and Addresses* (Banner of Truth 1978 edition) p 360

Adoration involved placing some of the reserved bread and wine in a tabernacle or container on the 'altar', and allowing people to come to worship Christ locally present in the bread and wine. One of the first ritualists to take up the matter was George Denison, Archdeacon of Taunton and Vicar of East Brent. He preached a series of sermons in 1853 in which he asserted that the body and blood of Christ, although present naturally in heaven, were nevertheless really, supernaturally and invisibly present in the Lord's Supper under the elements by virtue of the consecration. He further declared that worship was due to the body and blood of Christ present under the form of bread and wine. Backed by the Evangelical Alliance, Joseph Ditcher, the incumbent of the adjoining parish, laid a formal complaint before Archbishop Sumner. The eventual outcome was that Sumner held an ecclesiastical court at Bath on 25 July 1855 with Dr Lushington as his assessor. Lushington maintained that certain passages taken from the sermons were contrary to the teaching of the Church of England. Denison refused to retract and was in consequence deprived of all his preferments.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding this judgement, services of adoration and devotion became an increasingly popular aspect of ritualistic spirituality. It featured in the worship of many of the Tractarian sisterhoods which were established in the 1850s and 1860s. The Society of Margaret Community of nuns, founded at East Grinstead by John Mason Neale, was the first Church of England Order to have permanent reservation. For the purpose of devotion, reservation was usually in one kind (the bread only). This was placed in a receptacle called a ciborium which was then put into the tabernacle on the 'altar'. The practice of benediction represented a further extension of adoration. A consecrated wafer was placed in a glass fronted container called a monstrance. The priest then stood before the 'altar' and worshippers came forward and were blessed with the sacred host.<sup>11</sup>

As far as Evangelicals saw it, adoration was nothing short of idolatry. They held the practice to be explicitly condemned by Article XXV which stated that: 'The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them.' The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preached a sermon in 1866 entitled 'The Axe at the Root – A Testimony against Puseyite Idolatry'. He spoke out in forthright and strident terms against the practice of reservation and what he perceived as its attendant evils:

The noblest part of our nature is still the least exercised. Humbly to tremble before God, to confess sin before him, to believe him, to

10 N A D Scotland *John Bird Sumner Evangelical Archbishop* (Gracewing 1995) pp 116-117

11 G Rowell *The Vision Glorious* (Oxford: OUP 1983) p 114

love him – this is spiritual worship! Because this is so hard, men say, ‘No, no, let me crawl on my knees around a shrine! Let me kneel down before a pyx...’ That is quite easy but the hard part of religion is spiritual worship.<sup>12</sup>

### **Vestments and the Eastward Position of the Celebrant**

The eastward position of the celebrant at Holy Communion and the use of Roman Catholic mass vestments including the alb, chasuble and stole were further prominent aspects of ritualism. Many ritualists adopted the custom of standing at the east side of the communion table or ‘altar’ with their back to the people. In such a position the priest was held to be in a mediatorial position between the people and the ‘altar’. This was taken to imply that the priest was offering a sacrifice on behalf of his people. Ritualists attempted to justify this position on the basis of the rubric immediately preceding the Prayer of Consecration in the 1662 service which speaks of ‘the Priest standing before the Table’. However this understanding was in contradiction of the fourth rubric at the beginning of the service which enjoined the priest to stand ‘at the north side of the Table’.

In a sermon entitled the ‘The Restoration of Churches is the Restoration of Popery’, Francis Close was critical of those officiating ministers who ‘stand not “at the north side of the Table”, as directed by the rubric, but at a distance of some feet from it – north west’. He also commended ‘the profanation’ of those who repeatedly ‘adore or bow towards the altar’ and ‘read the Epistle and Gospel on the eastern side of the rood-screen’.<sup>13</sup>

Vestments began to appear in the 1850s. For example, the Rev Brian King first used them in 1857 at St George’s Mission in London’s dockland when a group of his parishioners offered him a gift of two silk chasubles. Liturgical colours to indicate the changing seasons and festivals of the Church’s year became a growing feature. One observer reported seeing ‘green and golden priests’ at St Alban the Martyr’s Holborn. The alb, chasuble and stole were all originally everyday dress items in the early Roman Empire and had no religious significance whatsoever. Later, when the Christian Empire was overrun by the pagan Goths, many Christians retained Roman dress as part of their Christian witness. With the passing of time only the priests retained the old Roman dress and that during divine service. The alb (or basic garment), the chasuble (overcloak) and stole (badge of profession) thus became linked with the offering of the mass and its associated superstitions during the high Middle Ages. It was

12 C H Spurgeon ‘The Axe at the Root – A Testimony against Puseyite Idolatry: A Sermon Preached 17 June 1866’ *Twelve Sermons on Ritualism* (Passmore and Alabaster 1866) p 332

13 F Close *The Restoration of Churches Is the Restoration of Popery: Proved and Illustrated from the Authenticated* p 16

for this reason that the Protestant Reformers in England and Western Europe pronounced against these vestments.

Evangelicals expressed their disquiet at the wearing of vestments in a variety of ways. For example, Dr Charles Baring, the evangelical Bishop of Durham, suspended the Rev Francis Grey, Rector of Morpeth, from the office of Rural Dean because he had worn a black stole with three crosses embroidered on it.<sup>14</sup> In March 1867 Lord Shaftesbury introduced a bill into the House of Lords 'for better enforcing uniformity in clerical vestments and ornaments to be worn by ministers of the united Church of England and Ireland in the performance of public worship'. The bill enjoined the surplice and hood (or tippet) for use in saying public prayers and ministering sacraments and other rites of the Church but left the use of the black gown in the pulpit untouched. The second reading was moved on 13 May but was lost.<sup>15</sup>

A celebrated case involving the introduction of vestments concerned the Rev John Edwards who became Vicar of Prestbury in Gloucestershire. He arrived in the parish on 25 October 1860. He was a model Tractarian who restored the church along Camden lines and introduced a daily celebration of the Eucharist. At Christmas 1860 there were 39 communicants but at Easter 1869, the first occasion when communion was celebrated after the church had been restored, there were 215. The rapidly developing ritual at Prestbury, including the use of stoles, albs and chasubles, eventually attracted the attention of the Cheltenham branch of the Church Association, a Protestant society, which had been formed to take legal action against ritualistic practices in the Church of England. On Good Friday 11 April 1873 a local tailor by the name of Charles Combe, and another person who seems to have been Baron de Ferriers, sent a protest to Charles Ellicott, the Bishop of Gloucester. Although he was not a parishioner and had never received communion in Prestbury Parish Church, the bishop accepted the protest lodged in his name. Combe's case was heard in the Court of Arches on 23 January 1875, but no decision was reached because he was not a parishioner and was in fact renting a pew in a dissenting place of worship in Cheltenham.

Edwards was, however, subsequently required to appear again before the Court of Arches on several counts, and shortly before Easter 1878 he was suspended from his ministry for six months by the bishop. Although the bishop appointed Charles Lyne, another priest, to take his duty, Edwards insisted on doing it himself with the result that he was deprived of his incumbency altogether by Lord Penzance in the spring of 1880.<sup>16</sup> It was

14 W H B Proby *Annals of the Low Church Party* vol 2 (London: J T Hayes 1888) p 230

15 Proby p 228

16 Proby p 374

for this kind of reason that Spurgeon, who had a great dislike of vestments, accused the Church of England ritualists who wore the chasuble, stole and alb of proclaiming 'salvation by haberdashery'.

Earlier Bishop Samuel Waldegrave had described wearing the surplice in the pulpit as 'in many cases but the first of a series of Romeward movements'. Bishop Bickersteth of Ripon wrote in 1876 to a clergyman who had adopted vestments that: 'They are almost inseparably associated with the tendencies to Romish error and superstition.' He continued by stating that he did 'not believe it possible for you or any other clergyman who makes such innovations to acquit himself in the judgement of the Church at large'.<sup>17</sup>

Evangelicals disliked the ritual and ceremonial processions which accompanied vestments. Charles Haddon Spurgeon in another sermon entitled 'A Blow for Puseyism' declared:

Ritual performances are very pretty spectacles for silly young ladies and sillier men to gaze upon, but there is no shadow of spirit or life in them. The High Church ritual does not look like a divine thing; on the contrary, if I stand among the throng, and gaze at all its prettinesses, it looks amazingly like a nursery game, or a stage play. Want of taste, say you. Not so I reply; my eyes admire your glittering colours, and the splendour of your services is taking to me, as a man; I enjoy the swell of your organ, and I can even put up with the smell of your incense (if you buy it good), but my spirit does not care for these fooleries, it turns away sickened, and cries, 'There is nothing here for me; there is no more nourishment for the spirit in all this than there is food.'<sup>18</sup>

Francis Close, the ebullient incumbent of Cheltenham Parish Church from 1826 to 1856, was angered at the way in which the Tractarians 'all conspire to one result, The Superstitious and unscriptural Exaltation of the Priesthood'. He fulminated against 'the duty of confession to a priest, the elevation of the altar and its adoring priests'.<sup>19</sup> Like many Evangelicals, Close felt an intense dislike for the new styles of clerical dress which 'transform the Church's ministering servants into Popish or Jewish, sacrificing and interceding priests'.<sup>20</sup> Preaching in Cheltenham Parish Church he thundered:

17 M C Bickersteth *A Sketch of the Life and Episcopate of the Right Reverend Robert Bickersteth DD Bishop of Ripon 1857-1884* (London: Rivingtons 1887) p 214

18 C H Spurgeon 'A Blow for Puseyism' *Twelve Sermons on Ritualism* (Passmore and Alabaster 1866) p 563

19 F Close *Priestly Usurpation Its Cause and Consequences* (London: Hatchard and Son 1846) p 16

20 Close p 18

I protest against those who would take from her [the Church of England] the simple garments in which she has ministered for three hundred years, and cover her again with the meretricious decorations which she then renounced... who would again rivet the chains of her priestly tyranny on the hands of the lady.<sup>21</sup>

In a later sermon Close said: 'It is a pitiable sight to see a clergyman of decidedly evangelical principles walking in a procession among Catholics decked out in fancy dresses of all colours, who rejoice in his involuntary conformity to medieval fashion.'<sup>22</sup>

There were other aspects of ritualism which gave offence to Victorian Evangelicals. These included the use of incense in worship, the singing of the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) during the reception of the bread and wine at communion and bowing at the name of Jesus. Nothing, however, provoked a stronger reaction than the introduction of the confessional and the practice of priestly absolution.

### **The Confessional and Priestly Absolution**

Pusey's own use of the confessional with Keble as his ear began on 1 December 1846 and set a pattern for what followed. In 1846 Pusey preached a sermon entitled 'Entire Absolution of the Penitent' in which he pressed for the use of sacramental confession. He made reference to the Prayer Book order for the visiting of the sick as a moment for personalized confession and absolution.

In his charge of 1853 to the clergy of his Canterbury diocese, Archbishop John Bird Sumner turned to the question of the confessional or 'the perversion of certain of his own clergy' as he termed it. In a lengthy discourse Sumner pointed out that the Sacrament of Penance found no warrant in Scripture. He observed:

It is remarkable, further, that the Apostles themselves have left no example of the exercise of this special absolution. Peter used his power of the keys in a very different manner, when he opened the door of the Kingdom to them, saying, repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... We hear nothing of absolution. St Paul's forgiveness of the Corinthians offered no sentence of absolution.<sup>23</sup>

21 F Close *Priestly Usurpation Its Cause and Consequences* (London: Hatchard and Son 1846) p 18

22 F Close *The Catholic Revival or Ritualism and Romanism in the Church of England* 2nd edn (London: Hatchard and Co 1866) p 26

23 J B Sumner *The Charge of John Bird Lord Archbishop of Canterbury to the Clergy of the Diocese at His Visitation 1853* (London: Hatchard and Son 1853) pp 37-9

In his charge of 1858 to the clergy of Carlisle Bishop Montagu Villiers said: 'I am thankful that we appear to be clear of the filthiness of the confessional, as well as free, in nearly every parish, from the more harmless puerilities connected with the Church of Rome.'<sup>24</sup>

The antagonism against the confessional further increased on account of its use by 'slum ritualists' as part of the Anglo-Catholic missions of the later 1860s.<sup>25</sup> In his sermon entitled 'Priestly Usurpation its Cause and Consequences', Close denounced 'the duty of Confession' as 'one of the particular links in the great din of corrupt doctrine that was forged in this [the Papal] foundry of error'.<sup>26</sup>

The issue of the confessional came to a head in 1867 when the Rev James Ormiston, a London clergyman, engaged in what was described as an act of 'aggressive Protestantism'. He went incognito to the vestry of St Alban the Martyr's Church Holborn and joined the queue of those waiting to make their confession to the Rev Alexander MacKonochie. When his turn came, instead of expressing contrition for his sinful estate, he read out a protest against Catholic and ritualistic practices. Ormiston was subsequently required by the bishop to make an apology. At least one Evangelical, the Rev Daniel Wilson, also expressed his disapproval of Ormiston's conduct.<sup>27</sup>

Samuel Waldegrave, Bishop of Carlisle, preached a sermon which was subsequently published entitled 'The Apostolic Commission on Auricular Confession and Priestly Absolution'. He began by defining what he understood as confession which was not 'that general and open confession' nor 'that exceptional confession of the sick or dying penitent'. What he meant was 'that minute, that prolonged, that exhaustive confession of every thought, every word, every deed of ill, which needs to be drawn forth by questioning, detailed and often necessarily polluting, from the inmost recesses of memory and conscience'. Waldegrave continued: 'The whole scheme is a fond thing, vainly invented and hath no warranty of Holy Scripture.' His advice to those who felt drawn to make a confession was 'resist the very beginning of this evil'.<sup>28</sup>

Waldegrave took up the matter again later in the same year in his charge

24 H M Villiers *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Carlisle at the First Visitation of the Hon H Montagu Villiers DD Lord Bishop of Carlisle 1858* (London: James Nisbit 1858) p 12

25 G Rowell *The Vision Glorious* (Oxford: OUP 1983) p 135

26 F Close *Priestly Usurpation Its Cause and Consequences* (London: Hatchard and Son 1846) p 15

27 W H B Proby *Annals of the Low Church Party* vol 2 (London: J T Hayes 1888) p 230

28 S Waldegrave *The Apostolic Commission on Auricular Confession and Priestly Absolution* (London: William Hunt 1867) p 20

to the diocese. He warned against the practice of auricular confession which 'invests you with power over the maidens and matrons of your flock'.<sup>29</sup> He continued: 'Its noxious influence places human society itself at your feet.'<sup>30</sup> Francis Jeune, the evangelical Bishop of Peterborough, joined the fray. He reminded his clergy that it was only after the Lateran decree of the year 1215 had rendered auricular confession obligatory upon all members of the Western Church that it was used. 'By what means is forgiveness to be obtained by believers?' Jeune asked. 'By confession of sins to him who forgives.' 'Other absolution,' he declared, 'we need not.'<sup>31</sup>

## Further Evangelical Opposition to Ritualism

In addition to their individual writing and preaching against ritualism evangelical Anglicans formed in 1865 an organisation known as The Church Association. It was a riposte to the earlier founding in 1860 of The English Church Union whose purpose was to advance Catholic worship.

The Church Association had as one of its avowed aims to fight ritualism in the courts by means of legal action. Many, such as Lord Shaftesbury, who had tried to introduce various bills into Parliament to curb ritualism were growing frustrated at their inability to do anything. The Church Association had a number of influential members including the Rev Dr William Wilson, brother-in-law to the Bishop of Winchester. Canon Champneys, who was made Dean of Lichfield, was an original member of the Association and the Rev Hugh McNeill DD, Dean of Ripon, was also a member.<sup>32</sup>

The purpose of the Association was 'to uphold the doctrines, principles, and order of the United Church of England and Ireland, and to counteract the efforts now being made to pervert her teaching on essential points of Christian faith, or to assimilate the services to those of the Church of Rome, and to further encourage concerted action for the advancement and progress of spiritual religion'.<sup>33</sup> 'The Church Association [sought] to effect these objects by publicity through lectures, meetings, and the use of the Press, by Appeals to the Courts of Law...' in an effort to secure episcopal and other authoritative suppression of ceremonies, vestments and ornaments which had departed from the Church at the time of the Reformation.

29 S Waldegrave *The Apostolic Commission on Auricular Confession and Priestly Absolution* (London: William Hunt 1867) p 49

30 Waldegrave p 49

31 F Jeune *The Throne of Grace: Not the Confessional. A Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford on Sunday 18th October 1846* (London: Hatchard and Son 1846) p 40

32 W H B Proby *Annals of the Low Church Party* vol 2 (London: J T Hayes 1888) p 250

33 Proby p 223

A typical instance of a Church Association tract was that entitled 'Address to the Lay Members of the Council of the Church Association to the People of England'. It gives advice on how to recognize whether your parish clergyman is a ritualist or has ritualist sympathies:

The test by which the laity may detect such a man is easily applied. If the clergyman calls himself a priest [a note here indicated that by priest was meant one who performs a sacrifice]; if he tells his people that by his priestly power he can absolve them from sin; if he says that by his priestly act he can turn the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper into the body and blood of Christ – the case is clear, we can see what he is; he is not a pastor of the Reformed Church of England; he is a priest of the Church of Rome.

The pamphlet continued: 'He must be treated as such... such persons must be treated as men having the plague. They must be put in quarantine, lest they infect us.'<sup>34</sup>

A major aspect of the Church Association's campaign was the attempt to take ritualist clergymen to the Church Courts. There were a number of celebrated cases and some of the later ones after the Public Worship Regulation Act resulted in clergy serving time in prison. In 1867 the Church Association lodged a protest against Alexander MacKonochie for his ritualistic practices at St Alban the Martyr's Holborn. He was accused of a number of illegal practices including 'the elevation of the host, the use of lighted candles and the mixed chalice together with incense, chasubles of coloured silk, confessionals, stations of the cross and other popish toys'. The Court of Arches pronounced against most of these items. MacKonochie then appealed to the Privy Seal, a secular court, and this resulted in a three months' suspension from his ministry.

Two years later The Church Association moved against John Purchas, perpetual curate of St James' Brighton. He was arraigned on thirty-five counts including 'the hanging of a stuffed dove over the altar'. The Court of Arches ruled against Purchas on most points. Purchas' subsequent appeal to the Privy Seal if anything worsened the situation.

Eventually in 1867 a Royal Commission on Ritual was established headed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and Armagh. They discussed vestments and other issues but proved in the end to be ineffectual insofar as stemming the tide of ritualistic practice was concerned. This failure led to the passing of the Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874. The significance of this legislation was that clergy now had to recognize the right of secular courts to pronounce on spiritual matters.

34 W H B Proby *Annals of the Low Church Party* vol 2 (London: J T Hayes 1888) p 234

In the various struggles which the evangelical Church Association continued to promote, six points became crucial: vestments, the eastward position of the celebrant, wafer bread, incense, 'altar' lights and the mixed chalice. In the prosecutions which followed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century four clergymen were sent to prison and this did more than anything else to make the British public sympathetic to the ritualists. Furthermore, in the process of this controversy some Anglican Evangelicals began to lose sight of the fact that Protestantism had originally emerged as a 'protest for' the Reformed biblical faith and not a 'protest against' Romanism. They thus began to some extent to lose the support of both the Church and society in general. It must of course be recognized that to be *for* biblical Protestantism had the inevitable corollary of standing against the aggressive claims of Rome. This was true both at the time of the Reformation and in the latter part of the Victorian age.

In 1888 The Church Association turned on Bishop Edward King of Lincoln for observing the most advanced form of liturgy. This resulted in a prosecution which was upheld on some counts. However, the matter backfired in that King was widely known for his saintly living and the sympathies of many people began to move to the ritualists. From this point on the impact of The Church Association began to wane. Only The Protestant Truth Society, founded in 1890 by John Kensit, sustained a continuing campaign, often taking direct action to disrupt obnoxious services. At All Saints' East Clevedon for instance, the ritualist vicar issued brass knuckle-dusters so that members of his congregation could resist the Kensitites.<sup>35</sup>

## Denouement

Ritualism emerged within the Church of England as a steadily growing phenomenon as an integral part of the second phase of the Oxford Movement which was led by Pusey and Keble. Conflict between Evangelicals and ritualists was heightened by the Papal Aggression and the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1851. This led many Evangelicals to the view that ritualism was in reality Romanism in disguise. Francis Close of Cheltenham epitomized this view in his anti-papal sermons which were preached every Guy Fawkes day. It was his opinion that: 'Tractarianism within the bosom of our Church is a kindred spirit to the Roman Antichrist – and that it bears the great family likeness of the "Lying Spirit" – fraud and deception.'<sup>36</sup>

Close and others like him found they were able to tap support from a

35 D Bebbington *Evangelicals in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman 1989) p 147

36 F Close *The Roman Antichrist: A Lying Spirit* (London: Hatchard and Son 1846) p 27

residual English folk religion which was strongly Protestant in character. It revealed itself in the rent-a-mobs who disrupted ritualistic worship in the East End of London and engaged in acts of sporadic violence in Cheltenham and elsewhere.

The 1874 Public Worship Regulation Act represented the high point of the evangelical crusade against ritualism. But the prosecutions and imprisonments which followed in its wake began to turn public and church opinion in favour of the ritualists. With the coming of the First World War the ritualists were able to argue the need for reservation in order to give the sacrament to the dying in the trenches and on the field of battle. Perhaps the biggest deficit for Evangelicals in their fight with the ritualists was that it turned them in on themselves. They became introverted and neglected what Samuel Garratt called their 'old crusade against public evils'.

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