

# Why do we do things like that in church?

## The Puseyites

22.08.2004

We have been considering over the past 2 weeks, how Christians have chosen some of the practices of the Puritans and Pietists as they try to live Godly Christian lives. Today we consider how a major Anglican movement of the past 160 years has affected us. It has been described by many names, including Puseyites, but more commonly the Tractarian, or Oxford Movement, which flowed into Anglo-Catholicism.

Its effects have been so widespread that many Anglicans find it hard to believe that many traditions in Anglican churches have only been present for the past 160 years. In the 1500's, many of the practices were banned in the Church of England and ceased.

Parish churches mainly had low church practices. ie there were no crosses, no flowers, no standing for collections or the minister, no bowing to the table, no candles except for lighting, no coloured ribbons or cloths, no crucifixes, no fancy robes (just a black cassock, white surplice, black scarf and hood). Cathedrals had organs and choirs, but parish churches had other musical instruments if any at all, and no choirs.

Ministers had different ideas, but they did not affect the Sunday services of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, the Litany and occasionally a Holy Communion service. A Holy Communion service included Morning Prayer, Litany & Holy Communion, with unconfirmed people leaving after the sermon.

However, in the 1830's, at Oxford University, a small group of ordained tutors, published pamphlets called tracts. The tracts became widely distributed and debated. They became known as Tractarians.

Three leading figures of the early stage were John Henry Newman, Pusey (from where we get Puseyites) and Keble.

A scandal occurred in the church when John Henry Newman became a Roman Catholic, and eventually a Cardinal. Some ministers followed

him, while others crystallised their theology to what we now call Anglo-Catholicism.

This small group changed Anglicanism enormously. They reacted against the dryness of the English church by stressing the links back to the more colourful and flamboyant Medieval and Early church.

They translated into English, the Latin and Greek works of early Christian writers, and emphasised the English church's continuity with them, in spite of the reformation (which they saw as a hiccup).

Because English society had embraced the more triumphant music and bolder art of the Romantic era, people wanted a bolder and flamboyant church. The Oxford movement gave that to churches, and it spread through all Anglican dioceses across the world.

Whether ministers and wardens accepted Anglo-Catholic theology or not, it became popular in most Anglican churches, to decorate the building by introducing things like flowers, and to return to a more Roman Catholic style of church. Evangelicals tried to stop this swing, and often church debates raged through the courts and press, in a similar way to the past debates about the ordination of women.

About 160 yrs ago, the then Archbishop of Canterbury chose a Tractarian bishop for Newcastle, much to Sydney's dislike. It was the start of the animosity between these two dioceses.

For the Christian, Sunday services looked and smelt different, and they had to do different things.

**The range of services changed, & Holy Communion became the dominant service.** Pusey believed in transubstantiation and taught this in his very popular tracts. ie he believed that the bread and wine changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus during the consecration prayers, and that the priest was resacrificing Jesus' body on the cross each service.

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Since more people believed that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Jesus, ministers began to bow to the table and called it an altar instead of the Holy Table. After a break of 300 years, they brought back incense and ornate sacrificing clothing called vestments, such as the chasuble, which is a poncho like garment. Special candles, not needed for lighting, were introduced.

People were asked to stand for the minister's entrance, and small churches stopped using musical instruments like forerunners of guitars and went into debt to buy organs, so that they could sing the responses, just as the cathedrals did. Varying the colours of the cloths and bookmarks in church according to the church calendar also became popular.

Where Pusey's theology took hold, people **related to God** through the sacraments. They stressed not only the 2 Sacraments ordained by Jesus, ie Communion and Baptism, but they also stressed the other 5 which were set aside at the Reformation. They were Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and extreme Unction. A Tractarian considered himself to be right with God through the grace which comes from receiving the sacraments in the liturgies of the church. So there was less of an emphasis on preaching and reading the Bible. Small groups became unnecessary and life rotated round services.

Even if they did not accept Anglo-Catholic theology, almost every Anglican church changed in some way - even if it was just through getting an organ, or building a shelf above the table to place their new cross and flowers, as it was illegal to put them on the table. Churches became more decorated and cross shaped in structure, so that a choir separated the holy table and priest from the laity. The Book of Common Prayer says the table is to be in the body of the church, or in the chancel. St James' King St used to have the table in the middle, but moved it further away from the laity.

And if Anglo-Catholic theology was not accepted, much more symbolism was introduced. People were taught to see the symbolic nature of the additions. eg the 2 candles on the table remind us of the gospels and the epistles. The colours of the seasons remind us of certain aspects of Jesus' life and divinity. Incense reminds us of the prayers of the saints raising to heaven. The cross reminds us of His death and since it is empty, it reminds us of his resurrection.

The end result was that Christians either could not relate in a personal way with God without a priest and rituals, or their focus on symbolism separated them from Jesus. eg it's like a husband kissing his wife's ring every morning, and talking to it and through it, instead of kissing and talking with her. The symbol replaced the relationship.

Such are the dangers of those church practices.

People wanted more reality and feeling of God's presence. Roman Catholics had pursued 3 methods of trying to come closer to God, and this was copied in the Anglican church.

**The first was Opus Dei** or work of God. Anglican monasteries and Orders began, and Christians became monks or nuns.

**The second was to become more engrossed in the liturgy**, seeking more of the significance of the rituals & what God is supposed to be doing as the priest does various actions.

**And the third was to seek a mystical dimension.** This happened in two ways:- The first was by meditating on the conscious awareness of images, whether Biblical, pictorial or rosary beads. Language and concepts are maintained.

The second is by contemplation. This moves beyond language into silent praying. The soul is supposed to ascend to God by the 3-fold way. J.W.C. Wand, an archbishop of London in the middle of the 20th century, wrote a book called 7 Steps to Heaven, in which he outlined the old

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Catholic method of reaching bliss.

It involved purging your mind of sins, and emptying your mind of every distraction. Then feel God filling you with calm and comfort, and finally attaining after lots of practice the beatific vision, which is ultimate bliss, of deep union with God.

Eastern meditation became more important. Less time was spent on finding out what God has said in the Bible, and more time was spent searching nothing trying to find God. --- To me, that is a waste of time! God is already so available and so near.

The Oxford movement has had a monumental impact in the Anglican church. And we have drawn heavily from it. From its early years, this parish has had ministers who, while not Anglo-Catholic, have wanted good rituals.

But more recently there were people here who have drawn more from another movement. We will consider Pentecostalism next week.

As you understand your heritage more, think carefully why you do certain things, and work out if they are good to keep, or if they need changing. Chat to each other about them. Talk to me if you would like. Think through what being a Godly hristian is, and have a reason for the ideals and hope you have.