

AN OPEN LETTER TO AN ANGLO-CATHOLIC

THE long, almost life-long, friendship between us will clear this letter from the charge of impertinence. At the outset of our friendship we recognised that though we did not see eye to eye in matters of revealed truth, yet no statement of what either of us regarded as true could endanger our friendship.

It was a very friendly gesture of yours to send me the manifesto which your wing of the Anglo-Catholic Movement has drawn up. Your name does not appear amongst those that have officially given the manifesto their signature. But I know that among the many who will champion the manifesto none will outrun your whole-heartedness.

The Centenary of the Anglo-Catholic, or Tractarian, Movement begets almost a whirlwind of thought. Were it kept, as it will not be kept, by an absolutely united body of believers it would make an old Catholic like myself recall the dramatic story of a movement which, after an almost contemptible beginning in an Oxford common-room (like so many other lost and forgotten causes), went on to give the Catholic Church two cardinals, many bishops and priests, and a flock of lay converts perhaps unparalleled in the history of West or East. Amidst the regrets we still feel that Froude, Keble, Pusey were not given to us, yet we thank God for Newman, Manning, Ward, Wilberforce and a host of others. But our mingled thoughts of thanksgiving and regret are not as simple as a unanimous Centenary might arouse. Your manifesto has further complicated our emotions. Let me approach this complication by an authentic incident. Some years ago a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, a devoted Anglo-Catholic, consulted me about his duty to his conscience. He said that his mind was quite made up as to the duty of being in communion with the See of Rome. But, he added, just as there may be valid reasons for postponing for a short time the formal reception for the pur-

pose of instruction, or for domestic reasons, so may there be valid reasons for postponing it for a longer time. Amongst such valid reasons for postponement none could be so weighty as that of preparing others to take the same step. Therefore, it seemed to him that as he felt he could prepare others to enter into communion with Rome, his present, temporary (though indefinite) duty was to remain in communion with the two Provinces of Canterbury and York. On this point of conscience he consulted me. I replied, 'Your case of conscience is as momentous as the historic case of conscience of the Jansenists. I will not answer. You must ask Rome.' I do not know if he followed my advice. But I know that within a few months he was within the welcome of Rome.

How often have you discussed the question of your coming into visible communion with the See of Rome? Almost every argument seemed to make such a step a matter of even urgent duty. Many if not most of your brethren were convinced that your refusal to follow that duty was a clear act of treachery to the Church of England. Some were even persuaded that you stayed as traitors within the Church by the work and by the money of the Church of Rome! I am not recalling this unpleasantness of your position for the purpose of passing judgment on you or your critics. I am but pointing out that your manner of interpreting the religious life of the Church of England seemed to many of your fellow Anglicans an obvious assertion of the claims of Rome.

You were agreed on this. But you were not agreed that those critics who thought you were Roman emissaries, and indeed traitors, in the Church of England were to be accepted as authentic interpreters of what was and what was not authentic Anglicanism. Indeed, you were able to point to a tradition within the Church of England that the successor of St. Peter was *de jure ecclesiastico* if not *de jure divino* the visible head of the visible Catholic Church; just as the Archbishop of Canterbury was *de jure ecclesiastico* but not *de jure divino* the visible head of the Pro-

vince of Canterbury. The duties towards such a *de jure ecclesiastico* head of the visible Church were too obvious to allow your treachery-accusing critics to keep pressing their attack.

Against the seemingly overwhelming arguments for entering into visible communion with what you looked upon as the visible head of the Catholic Church you urged the one argument urged by X—— for some years before he laid it to rest in Rome. It naturally appeared more compelling to you than to me. How often—and you will allow me to say, how despairingly—I have heard you say: ‘If I were merely to follow logical arguments I should join the Church of Rome to-morrow, because Rome is the rightful Head of the Catholic Church, and unique Centre of Catholic Unity. But logic is not life; nor are principles facts. As a matter of logical principle I should join the Centre of Catholic Unity at once. But the fact, and the duty, seem to be that I should stay in the Church of England in order to make it see, as I see, that the only centre of Catholic Unity in Faith and Morals is the Chair of Peter. In other words, I feel it my bounden duty to stay in the Church of England *in order to catholicise it.*’

In saying this you did not expect me to agree with you, lest we should be justifying the critics who thought you were remaining in the Church of England as the official and even the paid agents of Rome. But I frankly accepted your distinction between logic and life—*i.e.*, between logical and psychological processes. Moreover, I could only accept the common ethical doctrine of the sinfulness of disobeying a false conscience. I agreed that whilst you conscientiously thought (what I could not disprove or prove) that you were catholicising the Church of England, your conscientious decision must be judged not by me, nor by men, but by God.

But some of us on this side of the religious separation are wondering whether your Manifesto has not put matters in a new light, and even in a new arrangement. The group of signatories to the Manifesto acknowledge themselves

members of the historic Tractarian or Anglo-Catholic Movement. In the sphere of religious paternity Froude and Keble and Pusey are as authentically their acknowledged Fathers as are Augustine or Chrysostom or Cyprian. You feel as they feel the present position of the Anglo-Catholic as a poignant domestic tragedy, recalling the pathetic confession that 'a man's enemies shall be those of his own household.'

It would be almost a deliberate misreading of plain facts to think that, for you, the tragedy of these, your fellow Anglo-Catholics, is to ignore the historic claims of Rome. It is hard to be patient with those who represent you as a very vocal minority who see little but the Vatican. To cry 'Rome' in answer to your considered and sober manifesto is to renounce even the amenities of discussion.

Far deeper than a charge of ignoring the obvious claims of Rome does your Manifesto go. Your weighty Bill of Accusation contains these words:

' Liberal theologians antagonistic to the Catholic Revival and its ideals have expressed their satisfaction with the extent to which the Movement has become permeated with Modernistic teaching. •

' In current Anglo-Catholic expositions of the Faith, novel theories, marked by evasions and accommodations of a modernistic character and *contrary to the historic Catholic position*, are frequently set forth.

' On such supreme and vital matters as the Person of Our Lord and the union of the two Natures in Him—the Interpretation of Holy Scripture—the Authority and Infallibility of the Church—and the Moral Standards of historic Christianity—much of the teaching openly propagated within the modern Movement is in sad contrast with the orthodoxy of the original Oxford Fathers, and with the Catholic standards to which, *ex professo*, the Anglo-Catholic Movement itself makes appeal.'

You will allow us to see in these words a crisis not only in the Anglo-Catholic Movement, but in the splendid loyalty which you and the signatories still give to the Church of England. Unless we have misunderstood the motives keeping you from communism with what you recognize

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as your Mother Church, Rome, this Manifesto takes away your last plea for preferring Canterbury and York to Rome. Did you not urge that in point of fact the Anglo-Catholic Movement meant the gradual catholicising of the Church of England? The Movement which Froude and Keble and the Oxford Fathers had begun might be expected to have a future (of catholicising the Church of England) which would not deny its past. But, if your Manifesto is true in fact, the modern Anglo-Catholic Movement has denied its past! A century ago, when the Movement began, its chief aim, hope and duty was to catholicise the Church of England. But for you, whose anguish the Manifesto reveals, the chief aim—if not hope—must be to catholicise the Anglo-Catholic Movement. In other words, if you still feel you must remain in a Church which seems irked by your remaining, it can only be in order to re-catholicise a Unity which was itself to re-catholicise the Church.

And for that shadow of a shadow you withhold your fellowship from the Church which, alone in the upheavals of to-day, is defending the old sanctities of Faith and Morals.

VINCENT MCNABB, O.P.

LAURA LOVAT

Who, a lucid mystery proving
Gave thee thus a name so loving?
Out beyond thy furthest dreaming
Undiscovered Light hath shone.
In that Light thy name beseeching
Love Itself hath looked upon.

ELIZABETH BELLOC.