

## **“The Oxford Movement - A Noble Effort for Revival Too Feeble to Fight against the Changing World” – Elaine Y. Ho (MCS2)**

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### **Introduction**

The Oxford Movement (the “Movement”) commenced in 1833 in England as a response to Erastianism and an effort for the revival of the Church of England. The Movement started with a group of intellectuals in Oxford, and quickly spread through the country. It subsequently faded off towards the end of the nineteenth century.

This paper attempts to examine the Movement with a view that although it had initially created a stir of commotions both in the Church of England and in the English society, the successes were short-lived, and it ultimately failed in accomplishing its original objectives.

The paper will start with the context and background to the Movement where it took place, followed by a brief discussion of its key players. Thirdly, it will outline the history of events. Fourthly, the impacts of the Movement will be discussed. Finally, the paper will present an evaluation of the Movement.

### **Context and Background**

The Movement was nurtured in a period of trial in the relationship between the State and the Church of England from 1828 to 1833.<sup>1</sup> The Church of England was in unprecedented and gruesome danger during the reign of King William IV in 1833, when the Movement began.<sup>2</sup> The situation in England made it apparent that changes were needed for the Church to flourish, or even to survive. However, High Churchmen, those who were “stiff for the Church of England” and who were “strong defender[s] of the Establishment”<sup>3</sup>, in the Anglican hierarchy obscured the Church of England from being aware and willing to adapt to the changing situations. Most clergymen in the Church of England remained rigid and stubbornly grasped onto their traditional rights and privileges, without responding to a society undergoing immense changes. As a result of industrialization and urbanization, huge transformations were taking place in England at that time. The cry for higher religious tolerance, social justice, and the eradication of various traditional privileges held historically by the Church, came much louder from the growing working and middle classes.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Status of the Church*

The Church was predominantly Erastian ever since the English Reformation. She had been subject to the State government, with a shift in power from the Tudor monarchs since Henry

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<sup>1</sup> G. Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?* (London: Continuum, 2002), 45.

<sup>2</sup> S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: The Faith Press, 1963), 20.

<sup>3</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>4</sup> K. Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, Vol .III, 1833-1998 (London: SCM Press, 1998), 73.

VIII's era, to the Commons and Parliament after the Revolution in 1688.<sup>5</sup>

The Church of England herself was in a miserable and corrupted state, both morally and spiritually. Absenteeism was frequent: many parishes were without any clergyman in residence<sup>6</sup>, and bishops were in no better positions.<sup>7</sup> Cathedrals became centers of extravagant livings, where clergymen enjoyed hefty salaries.<sup>8</sup> Confirmations were administered to large groups of unprepared candidates, with an account by Spark the Bishop of Chester that he once confirmed eight thousand children in Manchester in one day.<sup>9</sup> Sunday services and the sacraments were infrequently attended by the people, and they were conducted in a dull and uninspiring manner.<sup>10</sup> Some churches were even closed all week.<sup>11</sup> Worst yet, the standard of moral and duty amongst clergymen was low, with many of them being ordained without preparation.<sup>12</sup> Clergymen were generally unpopular, with the most hatred being directed towards the bishops for their wealth and opposition to Parliamentary reform.<sup>13</sup> According to the Bishop of Durham in 1831, “[t]he Church of England never had to contend with so great a number of open and avowed enemies.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, there was a general sense of ignorance of the principles for which the Church of England stood. The Oxford Movement was thus born from the anti-Roman sentiments since the passing of the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act, “to avert the danger of people becoming Romanists from ignorance of Church principles.”<sup>15</sup>

### *The Political Atmosphere*

During that time, there were many enthusiastic reformers in England, who thought that the ill-state of the Church could be healed by education and political reforms. John Henry Newman, who shall be introduced later in this paper, called these reformers the Liberals.<sup>16</sup> Liberalism was a new intellectual force outbursted with the French Revolution. But the very Liberalism which was threatening at the eve of the Oxford Movement was an attack on Christianity. It believed that all evils and sorrows of mankind could be cured by rational intelligence, education and civilization.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> C.P.S. Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After* (London: A.R. Mowabray & Co. Ltd., 1932), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 23-4.

<sup>9</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 25-6.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 25, quoting R. W. Chrch, *The Oxford Movement 1833-1845* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1891), 241.

<sup>16</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 23-4.

In addition, the Tory government to whom the Church had been very closely allied, and who shared the same Erastianism as the Church<sup>18</sup>, had become increasingly reactionary to the wills of the people. The government was forced to repeal the Test and Corporation Act in 1828, and the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829. Most churchmen were hostile towards these actions, and the emancipation was regarded, especially in Oxford, as a betrayal to the Church. In 1833, the Whigs gained control of the government, with the Dissenters and the emancipated Roman Catholics as their allies, further cornering the Church of England.<sup>19</sup> In 1833, the government introduced the Church Temporalities Act for Ireland<sup>20</sup> to reduce the number of Irish bishoprics and the amount of payment to the Irish Church, and it was passed shortly after.<sup>21</sup>

The men of the Oxford Movement tried to salvage the Church from her miserable condition by putting forward “the old idea of the Catholic Church, with its divine origin and its ministry reaching back through the Apostles to the Lord, and to make men see in it no mere State Establishment, but a visible Society founded by the Lord Himself, with tremendous powers and supernatural claims. With this idea the Movement began to preach once more the almost forgotten doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church, with all that it implied.”<sup>22</sup>

## Key Players of the Movement

### *The Main Players*

The Tractarians were the leaders of the Oxford Movement who presented their ideas through popular tracts. Below is a brief account of four of the main leaders of the Movement.<sup>23</sup>

John Keble (1792-1866) was the son of a High Church clergyman. He became an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College in Oxford in 1806, and became a fellow at Oriel College in 1811. In 1815, he was ordained as a minister. He worked as a tutor at Oriel from 1817 to 1823, until he returned to serve at his father’s parish. In 1827, he published a collection of his poems in *The Christian Year*, only to soon find himself as one of the most widely read poets of his age. Oxford University elected him to the Professorship of Poetry in 1831. From 1836 to his death, he was the Vicar of the small Hampshire village of Hursley.<sup>24</sup>

John Henry Newman, born in 1801, was the son of the partner of a small bank. In 1816, he experienced his first religious conversion experience, to Evangelicalism, the same year which he started at Trinity College, Oxford as an undergraduate. He was elected a Fellow at Oriel in 1822, ordained as a deacon in 1824, and as a priest in 1825. In 1828 he became the Vicar at St. Mary’s, the University Church. Since then, he showed himself as one of the greatest

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<sup>18</sup> S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 34-5.

<sup>23</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol 3, 2003 ed., s.v. “Oxford Movement”

<sup>24</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 49-50.

preachers in Anglican history. His power in preaching, coupled with that of Keble's, helped pulled many supporters over to the Tractarian camp.<sup>25</sup>

Richard Hurrell Froude was born in 1803 into a traditional High Church clerical family. In 1821 he entered Oriel College as an undergraduate, and in 1823 joined Robert Wilberforce and Isaac Williams in one of Keble's reading parties. It was obvious that Keble was one of the greatest influences to Froude's life. In 1826 Froude was elected a Fellow at Oriel. At the beginning of the Movement, Froude served as the agitator and brought Keble and Newman in closer understanding of each other. His health remained fragile and he died in 1836.<sup>26</sup>

Edward Bouverie Pusey was born in 1800 to a relative minor landed family. He arrived at Christ Church, Oxford as an undergraduate in 1819. In 1823, he was elected a Fellow at Oriel and met Newman for the first time. Pusey was never part of the original inner circle of the Movement. In 1830 he became a Canon of Christ Church. Pusey joined the Movement when he first made a contribution to the *Tract for the Times* (the "Tracts") in 1834. His academic reputation and social connections immediately gave status and fame to the Movement. In 1835 Pusey became a more convinced Tractarian with publication of three tracts on baptism.<sup>27</sup>

### *Why Oxford?*

It was no surprise that Tractarianism originated from the University of Oxford. In the early nineteenth century, Cambridge and Oxford were the only two universities in England, and both institutions were exclusively Anglican. All undergraduates were required to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of 1563. This requirement effectively excluded the Dissenters and the Roman Catholics. Every year more than half of the graduates proceeded to ordination in the Church of England. Oxford was known to have a higher adherence to orthodoxy while Cambridge was described as more inclined towards Evangelicalism. At that time, Oriel College in Oxford was the pre-eminent intellectual college that attracted many brilliant minds, out of which the key players of the Oxford Movement were originated.<sup>28</sup>

### **History of Events**

Although there has been much discussion amongst modern scholars as to when precisely did the Oxford Movement begin, the traditional starting point was set on Sunday July 14, 1833, when John Keble preached his sermon "National Apostasy" at St. Mary's, Oxford.<sup>29</sup> The sermon was preached at the time when the Church Temporalities Act for Ireland was

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<sup>25</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 51-2.

<sup>26</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 50-1.

<sup>27</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 53-4.

<sup>28</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 48-9.

<sup>29</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 45-6.

introduced,<sup>30</sup> and was a protest against the Parliament's act in reducing half of the Irish Sees, which Keble termed as "a rejection of national profession of religion" or a National Apostasy.<sup>31</sup> Although the sermon did not instantaneously create any turbulence, one of the immediate consequences was the calling of a meeting at Hadleigh ten days later, amongst four distinguished intellectuals who represented all the old universities: the Revd. Hugh James Rose originally from Cambridge, the Revd. William Palmer who was a Dublin graduate settled in Oxford, the Revd. the Hon. Arthur Philip Perceval and the Revd. Richard Hurrell Froude, both from Oxford.<sup>32</sup> The attendants discussed about what ought to be done next. Apparently no substantial plan was being decided, apart from the decision to form an association in defense of the Church, which did not prove to be a success and slowly died away.<sup>33</sup>

On September 9, 1833, Newman published the first *Tracts for the Times* which served to be "the first shot fired in the actual battle<sup>34</sup>." Tracts had been a popular Evangelical weapon for fifty years.<sup>35</sup> In any event, Newman was responsible for the style and character of the early tracts. Tract 1 was titled *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission*, which "reminded the clergy of the gift they had received in ordination, and [bade] them speak of it, in order that people [might] know on what their claims to consideration rest."<sup>36</sup> Tract 2 titled *The Catholic Church* was a protest against Erastianism.<sup>37</sup> This highlighted the difference in opinion between the Oxford School, or the Tractarians, and the old High Churchmen, with the latter wishing to defend the Establishment as much as possible.<sup>38</sup>

The Tractarians' popularity grew, attracting many new recruits. Later in 1833, a new monumental stage was reached when Pusey joined the campaign in publishing Tract 18 on fasting. Pusey's accession gave the Movement increased respect and status.<sup>39</sup>

In 1834-5, the Tractarians joined forces with other churchmen of other parties when the Parliament introduced a bill that tried to abolish the subscription requirement of the Thirty-Nine Articles by all entering students in Oxford. If the bill were passed, Dissenters would also be allowed into the university the same way they have entered the Parliament. The Tractarians thus waged a campaign with the old High Churchmen in defense of the religious purity of Oxford.<sup>40</sup> The alliance of the two parties effectively barred the Evangelicals from public protest against the new theological stance of the Tractarians. At the same time, the conservatives had

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<sup>30</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 57-8.

<sup>34</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 56-7.

not yet realized the gulf that was building up between themselves and the Tractarians, giving time to the Tract writers to exert their influence on clergy and laity outside of the university.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, until 1836-7 the Movement grew in size and popularity both in and outside of Oxford.<sup>42</sup> It received little opposition until the first big storm hit the Tractarians in 1838, when the first two volumes of the *Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (the “*Remains*”) were published.<sup>43</sup> Keble and Newman edited the journals and letters of the late Revd. Froude who passed away in 1836 and put them to publication. The material was mind-blowing to the readers at that time because the author, who was an esteemed clergyman of the Established Church, “reviled the Reformers in robust language, praised medieval saints like Becket, and used the Roman breviary in his devotions.”<sup>44</sup> The Evangelicals were horrified at the alliance with Popery in Tractarianism, as they so interpreted. At the same time, the old High Churchmen were put in a shock as well.<sup>45</sup>

Many modern scholars agreed that Keble and Newman deliberately published the *Remains*, fully prepared for the controversial consequences it would bring them. The aggressive ethos of Tractarianism had been forcing people to take sides. And by purposefully shocking the public, Keble and Newman aimed at alienating the weaker supporters (such as the conservatives) and bringing out the truly dedicated ones.<sup>46</sup>

Although Newman regarded July 1838 as the turning point of the Movement, it was not until the publication of Tract 90 in March 1841 when the real storm took place.<sup>47</sup>

Since the beginning of the Movement, the Tracts had been against Popery as well as against the Dissenters. When the *Remains* was published, the Movement showed bifurcation in pointing towards antiquity and the Caroline divines on one hand, and to Rome on the other. A Romanist party, which composed of people closely associated with Newman, grew in force.<sup>48</sup> They praised anything that was Roman, and disliked anything Anglican.<sup>49</sup> Later in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Newman wrote that back in 1839 he had already shown his doubts towards the Catholicity of the Church of England, and also to the *Via Media* theology which she had adopted since the English Reformation.<sup>50</sup> It was evident that the force of the new Romanist party further provoked his doubts and led him to reflect on the Thirty-Nine Articles.

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<sup>41</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 58-9.

<sup>47</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 86.

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 88-96.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 61.

On February 27, 1841, Newman published Tract 90 titled *Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* which dropped a bombshell to the Movement. In this Tract, it was clear that Newman's theological concern shifted from the Apostolicity of the Church of England to her Catholicity. He examined fourteen of the articles in the Thirty-Nine Articles (the "Articles") which were supposed to be anti-Rome,<sup>51</sup> and concluded that those who signed the Articles misinterpreted what the drafters originally had in mind.<sup>52</sup> Newman asserted that the original intention of the Articles were of inclusion and peace with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>53</sup> For example, he distinguished between the terms "Romish" which the Articles used and "Roman Catholic." He claimed that "Romish" referred to popular beliefs of Catholic and "Roman Catholic" represented the official doctrine of the Church. Therefore, it was the former that the Articles were condemning, not the later. Furthermore, the formal decrees of the Council of Trent were not issued until after the Articles was published, therefore the Articles could not be condemning the contemporary beliefs of Rome.<sup>54</sup>

The publication of Tract 90 immediately invited attacks. The Heads of Houses of Oxford issued a condemnation against Newman for dishonesty. Newman promised to cease the series of the Tracts. In return, he asked that the bishops not to condemn Tract 90 and would allow him to continue printing it.<sup>55</sup>

Another blow hit the Tractarians when in 1843 Pusey was suspended from preaching in Oxford for two years for erroneous teachings in his sermon *The Eucharist, a Comfort to the Penitent*.<sup>56</sup> By then, Newman had retreated from the pulpit of Oxford to a small nearby village named Littlemore. On September 25, 1843, he preached his last Anglican sermon in the tiny Church there, entitled *The Parting of Friends*. It was a moment of intense emotions.<sup>57</sup>

All these incidents left a lasting impact on Newman. He described that from 1841, he was on his death-bed with regard to his membership with the Anglican Church, although he only slowly became aware of it at that time.<sup>58</sup> During his retirement in Littlemore, he concluded his research on the early Church. With regard to the question of how to find the true form of Christianity in light of different contemporary forms of the faith, with many mutually exclusive in their beliefs, Newman in his earlier *Via Media* years found his answer from Antiquity, the undivided early Church. However, this view point was replaced by Newman's new understanding of the dynamic development of the Christian Church and her doctrines, as the

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<sup>51</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> J. H. Newman, "Article xxii – Purgatory, Pardons, Images, Relics, Invocation of Saints" in *Remarks on Certain Passages of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, No. 90 of the *Tract for the Times*, 1841, available from <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/viamedia/volume2/tract90/> (cited 19 December 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 117.

institution changes her self-understanding over time. Newman concluded that only the Roman Catholic Church could satisfy all the tests that he devised in an attempt to distinguish the legitimate Church from the heretics.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently, Newman wrote on October 8, 1845 of his intention to ask Father Dominic Barberi to admit him into the “One Fold of Christ.”<sup>60</sup> He was received into the Roman Catholic Church the following day.<sup>61</sup> According to Peter Nockles, “The key to Newman’s ultimate loss of faith in Anglicanism lay in his attempt to erect a coherent dogmatic edifice on a structure never designed to support it.”<sup>62</sup> Some of Newman’s supporters preceded him in converting to Rome, while others followed him.<sup>63</sup> In 1851, another wave of secession took place due to a disagreement with the judgment of the Privy Council. As a result, Archdeacon Manning, Archdeacon Wilberforce and many other priests and lay people left the Church of England.<sup>64</sup>

To Keble, Pusey and other original members of the Movement who knew Newman personally and intimately, Newman’s conversion came as a thunder-bolt though at the same time was a long-dreaded event that was finally realized.<sup>65</sup> Yet on the whole, the Movement did not stop. It maintained its momentum and spread to more places geographically.<sup>66</sup> William Gresley, a High Churchman who joined the Tractarians, believed that the conversion of the Romanists was actually beneficial for the Movement. The conversion eliminated the Romanist forces within the Movement, allowing the Tractarians to freely declare again an Anglicanism that was more similar to the *Via Media* at the start of the Movement, and to build a Church of England which would be “in practice what she is in theory.”<sup>67</sup>

Between 1845 and the end of the Victorian era, the influence of the Movement was seen in various ways.<sup>68</sup> (Though in 1850, there was another hiccup in the Movement when Prime Minister Lord John Russell publicly blamed the Tractarians for “Papal Aggression” when the papal hierarchy was restored, resulting in anti-Catholicism and anti-Tractarianism.<sup>69</sup>) During this period, there was a revival in religious communities. A distinctive form of architecture and ceremonial was also developed. It is worthy to note that ritualism was not a natural product of the Movement as the Tractarians were sacramentalists but not ritualists. In addition, there was a development of Liberal Catholicism within the hearts of Anglicanism as manifested by the dominant High Churchman, Charles Gore. Gore edited the *Lux Mundi* which was published in

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<sup>59</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 64-5.

<sup>60</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 80.

<sup>62</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?* 66, quoting P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 129.

<sup>63</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 128.

<sup>64</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 88.

<sup>65</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?* 66.

<sup>66</sup> Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 80.

<sup>67</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?* 74, quoting W. Gresley, *A Second Statement on the Real Danger of the Church of England* (London: James Burns, 1847), 12 and 69-70.

<sup>68</sup> Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 80.

<sup>69</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 79-80.

1889, in which the writers expressed their “liberal teachings” which they thought was needed in order to be true heirs of the Tractarians. Gore considered Liberal Catholicism to be consistent with the Anglican appeal to Scripture, Antiquity and reason. Further, Gore applied his Liberal Catholicism by founding the Christian Social Union with several others in 1889 to help the needy, the poor and the deprived.<sup>70</sup>

## Impacts of the Movement

### *Emphasis on Apostolic Succession*

The battle against Erastianism had been a clear goal since the start of the Movement. In face of the State having seemingly abandoned the Church by interfering with her rights and possessions<sup>71</sup>, Newman raised the following question in his first Tract, “On what are we to rest our authority, when the State deserts us?”<sup>72</sup> He argued that the Church should rest her authority on the “apostolical descent”, or the apostolic succession as called by some, because Christ left His Spirit with His apostles, who in turn laid their hands on a series of successors up to their contemporary bishops. Newman distinguished the Church of England as having the true authority from the other Protestant Dissenter, who were amongst those dominating the Parliament in an effort of “deserting” the Church.<sup>73</sup> Newman further asserted, in his second Tract, that the State had no power to carry out spiritual functions like sending out missionaries and consecrating the Lord’s Supper. The authority of the Church again rests in apostolic succession. Newman stressed on the importance in believing in the Catholic Church which Christ has appointed, and by the Catholic Church he referred to the visible Church with episcopacy.<sup>74</sup>

The Tractarian position of spiritual authority in the visible Church starkly distinguished themselves from the other Protestant parties. On one hand, their assertion was contrary to the standpoint of the High Churchmen who were Erastian and pro-establishment in general. To the High Churchmen, the Church and the State were mutually supportive of each other, and it was to their best advantage to keep the status quo of the Church-State relationship. On the other hand, the Anglican Evangelicals were skeptical of the Tractarians’ emphasis on the visible Church, who instead believed that the emphasis should be placed on the invisible Church. The invisible Church is the true Church composing of elects known only to God, and not of those being ordained through episcopal order.<sup>75</sup> The Evangelicals were zealous in the arguments with the Tractarians, in an effort which they believed to be in defense of the Scripture and of the teachings of the Anglican Reformers. However, their disagreement with the

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<sup>70</sup> Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 81-2.

<sup>71</sup> J. H. Newman, *The Catholic Church*, No. 2 of the *Tracts for the Times*, 1833, available from <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/times/tract1.html> (cited 19 December 2005).

<sup>72</sup> J. H. Newman, *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission, Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy*, No. 1 of the *Tracts for the Times*, 1833, available from <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/times/tract1.html> (cited 19 December 2005).

<sup>73</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Newman, *The Catholic Church*.

<sup>75</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 30.

Tractarians unfortunately led them to be labeled as Dissenters or Puritans in disguise.<sup>76</sup> While the Evangelicals still believed that episcopacy was Scriptural in origin, the Dissenters outright denounced episcopacy, thinking that the Tractarian position as being “unchurch” to them.<sup>77</sup> The unique position that the Tractarians put themselves in since the beginning of the Movement impacted the steering of the direction and end results that fruited later in the Movement.

### *The Antiquity Church Model*

The Tractarians often turn to the Antiquity Church for evidence and authority of the theological stances that they were presenting. They were not unique in quoting the antiquity in justification for theological arguments, given the Caroline Divines in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Nonjurors, and also the High Churchmen up till the 1830's had all used the same techniques. However, the Tractarians were different from their predecessors in the Anglican tradition in one significant area. The predecessors quoted antiquity to the extent that its teaching collaborated with that of the Church of England, the normative model of the true Catholic Church since the Reformation. On the contrary, the Tractarians used the antiquity teaching in a completely opposite manner.<sup>78</sup> To them, “antiquity became an absolute standard and a final court of appeal.”<sup>79</sup> The normative model of the true Church was the Antiquity Church, and the Church of England was only a true Church only to the extent that she was in line with that model. However, the contemporary Church of England still contained what was necessary to be a true Church, only if she would realize herself and be a living embodiment of the Antiquity Church.<sup>80</sup>

In addition, Newman interpreted the early church history in a novel way. He attempted to draw parallels between the early Church and the contemporary Church. First, he equated the persecuting government in the fourth century to that in the nineteenth century England. Not only did Newman criticized the Whig politicians and their Tory followers, he also made a blow to the clergymen who betrayed the Church by adopting theological liberalism. Thus in response to liberalism, he drew a parallel between the heresies that were faced by the early Church, with liberalism which was attacking the contemporary English Church. In his Tract 73, titled *On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Religion*, Newman went as far as equating liberalism with modern popular Protestantism by claiming that both “were reducing the transcendent in divine revelation to human standards of judgment.”<sup>81</sup> Newman believed that this was a mistake commonly made by Evangelical preachers who often put human experiences in place of the divine.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> P. Toon, *Evangelical Theology, 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 171.

<sup>77</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 30-1.

<sup>79</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 31, quoting Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 114.

<sup>80</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 30-1.

<sup>81</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 34, quoting Stephen Thomas, *Newman and Heresy: The Anglican Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117-18.

### *The Concept of Via Media*

Using antiquity as a cornerstone, Newman developed a theory, called *Via Media*, which stated that the Church of England was closer in resemblance to the Antiquity Church than either the Genevan Protestantism or Roman Catholicism. In an effort to distinguish between true and heretical doctrines during antiquity, St. Vincent of Lerins drew a rule in the Vincentian Canon, by using the formula, “what has been believed everywhere, always and by all<sup>83</sup>.” Therefore, in Tracts 38 and 41, Newman attempted to establish that this formula was better applied to the Church of England than to the Romanists, who “had made unwarranted additions to the faith”<sup>84</sup>, or to the Reformers, who “had made equally unwarranted subtractions from it<sup>85</sup>.” Newman further developed his thoughts on *Via Media* in his *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church Viewed Relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism*. Unfortunately, despite his efforts in arguing that Anglicanism was the best middle ground between Romanism and Protestantism, Newman ultimately failed to have himself convinced<sup>86</sup>, and eventually converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845.

Although Newman and some of his followers eventually failed to subscribe to the superiority of *Via Media*, the discussion did however leave profound influence on how the Church of England perceived herself in relation to other Christians. Before the Movement, the High Churchmen would call themselves as both Catholic and Protestant, and would see that the Church of England as a middle ground between the extreme forms of Protestantism and Romanism. However, as proposed by Peter Nockles, the *Via Media* concept that Newman proposed was a novel one: it was a middle way between Protestantism *per se* and Romanism. High Churchmen were thus left to question themselves whether they were Protestants or Catholics, and they could no longer be both. As for the Evangelicals, they believed that the Tractarians had misinterpreted the antiquity, by saying that the Fathers also upheld the primary authority of the Scripture. The Evangelicals considered the Church of England to be a reformed Church within the Protestant camp.<sup>87</sup>

### *Re-emphasis on Sacraments and Ascetics*

In asserting that the Church of England should be a living model of the Antiquity Church, the Tractarians re-emphasized on the importance of sacraments to Anglican worship life, just as it was an integral part to Antiquity worship. They reaffirmed the necessity of sacraments to salvation. In Tract 1, Newman wrote, “As well might we pretend the Sacraments are not necessary to Salvation, while we make use of the offices of the Liturgy; for when GOD appoints means of grace, they are *the* means.”<sup>88</sup> The Tractarians were skeptical of the Reformed

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<sup>83</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 34-6.

<sup>87</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 36-7.

<sup>88</sup> Newman, *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission, Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy*.

theology on the Eucharist. In 1853, the Tractarian theologian Robert Wilberforce published *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, arguing that Christ's presence in the Eucharist as real and objective. He even called the Eucharist a sacrifice. The Church, through the visible sacramental life, became an extension of the Incarnation. To him, this was the centre of Christian life.<sup>89</sup> The Tractarian view invited attacks both from the High Churchmen and the Evangelicals. To the High Churchmen, the Tractarians deviated from the teachings of the Caroline and Nonjuror Divines. As to the Evangelicals, the Tractarians betrayed the Reformers' theology. The Wesleyans even believed that the Tractarian doctrine on Eucharist further proved the latter's' allegiance to Rome.<sup>90</sup>

The centrality of Eucharist, which feeds the Christian hearts and leads them to holiness, to Christian life, easily led the Tractarians to quest for holiness in Christian lives. There was an emphasis on ascetics amongst the Tractarians. Pusey, amongst many others, revived the practice of confession. In an attack of the Evangelicals in 1840, Isaac Williams developed the concept of Reserve, in accordance with the practice of the early Church in reserving the most sacred parts of Christian doctrine from pagans or catechumens until they had demonstrated that they were ready, both spiritually and morally, to receive them. He further went on affirming the necessity of good works amongst Christians. Needless to say, Williams' publication invited harsh criticisms from the Evangelicals and the Dissenters.<sup>91</sup>

### *Revival of Ritualism*

As mentioned above, the original Tractarians were not proponents of ritualism. In the 1840's and 1850's, the Tractarians regarded ceremonials in church as of secondary importance, where the priority was to change people's hearts. The majority of them kept ceremonials during services and Eucharists simple, and few adopted the practice of adhering to Medieval rubrics and wearing vestments. However, the practice of wearing vestments, lighting candles and ultimately burning incense increased in popularity since the late 1850's for a number of reasons. First, with the restoration of church buildings and the erection of new ones, many of them in Gothic style in imitation of the Medieval times, there came a Gothic revival in vestments as well. In addition, the Romantic movement also brought in influences of medievalism that fueled the Gothic revival. Furthermore, the advancement in the doctrine of Eucharist, especially by setting the definition and giving detailed explanations to Real Presence and Eucharistic Sacrifice, amongst the Tractarians fueled the development of ritual practices, such as in the use of ritual vestments and lighting liturgical candles. The older Tractarians showed mixed reactions towards the emphasis on ritualism by their successors: some of them remained

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<sup>89</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 37-40.

<sup>90</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 40.

<sup>91</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 43.

skeptical over the pastoral wisdom of introducing rituals to a congregation who did not often understand them, while some others accepted these rituals after initial hesitations.<sup>92</sup>

### *Other Impacts*

The Movement also left lasting influence on areas such as literature, fine arts, and the religious communities.

The Movement brought religious literature to new heights. Poetry and prose thrived during that period, and many were published in *The Christian Year*, a herald of the Movement.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, the period of the Movement produced many of the best-loved hymns in England.<sup>94</sup> In 1861, the renowned *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was published, signifying the peak of hymn-writings from the Movement.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, significant theological publications were made during the Movement. In 1838, Keble, Pusey and Newman began editing *The Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church anterior to the division of the East and West*. It was completed in 1885, encompassing forty-eight volumes and containing works of thirteen Fathers and ancient writers. Another result from the Movement was the publication of *The Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology*, which was a reprint and edit of some of the rare works of pre-Reformation theologians.<sup>96</sup> In 1846, a few Tractarians founded the *Guardian*, which witnessed the ideas of the Movement as long as the founders were alive.<sup>97</sup>

The Movement not only revived English literature, it also brought new faces to the area of fine arts, namely architecture, painting and music, all of which are directly used in the worship life. There was a Gothic revival in the English ecclesiastical architecture, to which some Evangelicals criticized.<sup>98</sup> Decorative arts including paintings and embroidery also thrived.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the Movement brought a revitalization of music in worship in the in parish Churches. There were also new and beautiful musical works produced during this period.<sup>100</sup>

In addition, the Movement resulted in a revival in religious communities. The number of religious communities multiplied in the second half of the nineteenth century, and within the seventy years after the start of the Movement, there were more than thirty of them in England. The vast number and varieties of religious communities indicated the influence of the Movement, invoking responses of dedication and commitment by the people.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 90-2.

<sup>93</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 145.

<sup>94</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 146.

<sup>95</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 147.

<sup>96</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 148.

<sup>97</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 153.

<sup>98</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 156-9.

<sup>99</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 160-1.

<sup>100</sup> Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement*, 162.

<sup>101</sup> Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 80.

## Evaluation

### *On the Authority of the Church*

One of the primary objectives of the Movement was to separate the Church authority from the State by re-establishing apostolic succession as the sole authority of the Church. Although the Tractarians had argued their case fluently on the above, their efforts ultimately failed. In 1874, the Parliament tried to suppress ritualism by passing the Public Worship Regulation Act. As a result, several clergymen were prosecuted and some were jailed.<sup>102</sup> The series of prosecution only ended in 1892 with the trial of Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln.<sup>103</sup> As reflected by this incident, it was apparent that the government still had an upper hand over the Church after the Movement. The Erastian stance of the government might be a remnant from the English Reformation practice of keeping the Church under State control for national stability. The State still decided to exert her control and influence over the Church in the last nineteenth century. It was only in the twentieth century when the Church was being marginalized by secularization and liberalism which in turn led to her decline, that the State had ceased to take as much interest in Church polity as before.

In an effort to establish Church authority in apostolic succession, Newman eventually failed to convince himself and thus sought for Catholicity by converting to Roman Catholicism. To many in the Protestant camp, Newman's conversion was seen a betrayal to Protestantism. However, in questioning where the authority of the Church really rests upon, Newman's rationales which eventually caused his conversion could actually shed some lights on all Protestant churches. Newman kept asking the question of how one could distinguish between true doctrine and heresies, and his attack on Protestant Liberalism was not without grounds. As an aftermath of the Reformation motto of *Sola Scriptura* manifested at its best, each denomination or church of the Protestant Church claims that she has the sole authority to interpret the Scripture. The result is that everyone has authority yet nobody has the final authority. Although most Protestant denominations still subscribe to the Apostle's Creed and believe in the "one holy Catholic Church", the definition of this one Catholic Church remains a blurred concept in Protestantism. Since no one has the final authority within the Protestant churches, Newman's question on how to distinguish between the legitimate and the heretics remain unanswered. Furthermore, even if we disregard Catholicity which Newman sought in Roman Catholicism in the end, does contemporary Protestantism possess apostolicity like the Antiquity Church, apostolicity which the other Tractarians believed to be where the true Church authority lies? In a way, the Church of England can still claim her apostolicity. After all, she still recognizes the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury to be historically succeeded from St. Augustine of Canterbury from A.D. 597.<sup>104</sup> As to the other Protestant denominations which refuted apostolic succession, the answer to Newman's question of Church authority remains an

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<sup>102</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 93.

<sup>103</sup> Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After*, 224.

<sup>104</sup> "The Succession of the Archbishops of Canterbury," available from <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/office/success.html> (cited December 21, 2005).

unending debate. Therefore, in certain ways, one cannot help but feel sympathetic towards Newman's conversion which was a result in his disappointment in trying to find an answer to a question that might be unanswerable.

### *On Reviving the Church of England*

The second objective of the Movement was to revive and reform the Church of England from her miserable state before the Movement. Unfortunately, this effort also proved to be a failure in the end. Albeit a brief revival in the Church, especially in the Tractarian parishes following the Movement<sup>105</sup>, the renewal came too feeble as an effort to save the Church in face of the gigantic wave of secularization that was sweeping through the Church and the whole of England. At the same time, although there seemed to be certain successes within the Church of England in the Tractarian's battle against Liberalism, as seen in the revival of ritualism, yet outside of the Church, the English society was being washed by liberalism. From the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, to the rise of capitalism which in turn brought industrialization, secularization and liberalism, the world was facing a powerful force that marginalized the Church, a force novel to Christendom. The Tractarians might not have anticipated the changes taking place in the playing field, or they might have been aware of the changes but were unable to do much to reverse the situation. In the end, the revival headed towards a direction that was completely out of touch with the larger picture of history. The Movement thus turned out to be only a feeble struggle against the strong secular tides.

Some may argue that the Movement came too late. Had it come at the dawn of industrialization, it might have had a larger and more lasting impact. However, one must remember that industrialization and secularization was a preeminently strong worldwide force (at least in Europe and in the U.S.) that commanded no point of return. Therefore, even if the Oxford Movement took place early in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, and even if it succeeded then, it is questionable whether it would be able to hold the fort in England in defense of the Church in the nineteenth century when the entire country, and the rest of Europe, was being attacked by the historical tide of secularization.

Liberalism proved to be a force which conquered the Church of England following the Movement. Below are a few of the examples that illustrate the above reality: liberalism became the main theology within Anglicanism in the twentieth century, the creation of the General Synod in 1970 laid the time bomb of Anglicans being a minority voice in Church legislation, and the General Synod voted for the ordination of women in 1992.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, although the Tractarians sought to convince the High Churchmen and the Evangelicals of the Catholicity of the Church of England in an attempt to revive the Church, the

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<sup>105</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 77-85.

<sup>106</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 95-7.

end result was regrettably a deeper division between the factions instead of further unification.<sup>107</sup> This discord also contributed to the failure in reviving the Church as a whole.

### *On the Revival of Sacraments*

The third impact that the Movement brought about was the revival of sacraments as necessary to salvation. This effort turned out to have a mixed result of success and failure. Even though the Movement successfully revived sacramentalism, the revival was not accompanied with adequate teachings for the congregation to fully understand the theology and rationales behind the rituals and vestments, which coincided with what the old Tractarians dreaded about. In a way the innocent effort of revival unfortunately became a step back to medievalism. The Medieval Church and the nineteenth century Church of England both proclaimed a sophisticated theology, which was quite naturally accompanied by meaningful and elaborate rituals. Unfortunately, neither congregation of the two periods fully comprehended the rationales behind such rituals. Yet at the same time, the two congregations were markedly dissimilar, making the results of such “incomprehension” of sacramentalism different. The Medieval congregation was relatively uneducated. Thus they had a much higher toleration towards “mysteries” in worship which they did not seek to understand, and such “mysteries” might arguably help them in getting in touch with the theology far beyond their grasp. On the other hand, the nineteenth century congregation was generally better educated, would probably demand a higher understanding of the different ceremonies in their worship. Therefore, while the revival of sacramentalism and ritualism in the nineteenth century was invaluable theologically, yet if it was not coupled with adequate and sound teachings, it might not be the best form to respond to the increasingly educated population in England. In contrast, other contemporary Protestant denominations seemed to be able to respond better to the English population. This was reflected in their thrive in the nineteenth century, while Anglicanism was struggling since the Movement.<sup>108</sup>

Where in today's Chinese Protestant churches, some of them are promoting the revival of liturgies, in response to rectify the flaws brought by an overdone deconstruction of Christian traditions. The efforts are admirable, and churches should accompany the promotion of liturgy with adequate theological teachings for their congregation in order to attain the most desirable results, bearing in mind the experience in sacramental revival from the Movement.

### *The Secondary Successes*

One must say that the primary objectives of the Movement, though appeared to be successful initially on surface, proved to be a failure in the end, as discussed above. However, the secondary results, such as the revival of religious communities, hymnology, literature and

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<sup>107</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 94.

<sup>108</sup> Carve T. Yu, “Oxford Movement,” Lecture discussed at the course of The Church in History (3): Modern Age, China Graduate School of Theology, Hong Kong, 9 November 2005.

architecture, which the Tractarians might not have intended initially, did leave important legacies to the Church heritage which Christians can still enjoy today.

### *Lessons from the Movement*

The efforts and experienced from the Movement serve as invaluable lessons for the Church. In a way, the Tractarians did not realize they were indeed fighting a losing battle. Instead they thought they could revive and salvage the “Church”, and by that they focused only on the Church of England, instead of the Catholic Church as a whole. This parochial view of the Movement prevented it from coming to fruition in the end. The Tractarians aimed at saving the Church of England. Therefore they concentrated only on problems within their denomination, while neglecting spiritual issues in a bigger picture (like the threat of liberalism and secularization to Christianity) that were confronting the entire Kingdom of God, leading to the ultimate failure of the Movement. When the Church (by this it refers to the Catholic Church) today yearns for renewal, she must move beyond only resolving denominational issues. Instead she should have a broader and more catholic perspective in striving to revive the whole Kingdom of God, so as to avoid committing the same mistakes that the Tractarians made.

In addition, and as discussed above, the secularization current that was sweeping through the country during the Movement was in fact too strong for the Tractarians to conquer. In today's context, the Church should be fully aware that she is being marginalized in a secular and pluralistic world. Members of the Church should then be more informed of their battlefield when they fight the battle for the revival, or even survival, of the Church. Moreover, Christians should take one step further in anticipating the undercurrents that may be hitting the world in the next few decades or century, such that they may be better prepared for the battle when the challenges come, and that they may avoid making the same mistake of inaccurately estimating the battle situation like their predecessors did in the Movement.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst the successes of the Movement were short-lived, and in the end its efforts were too feeble to fight against the torrents of the changing world, leading to its failure in achieving the objectives the Tractarians originally intended to, it was still a movement in the history of the Christian Church which is worth contemplating upon. In particular, the unyielding efforts which the Tractarians made still demand much respect. They exemplified Christians who fought relentlessly to defend the authority and independence of the Church. They displayed unreserved passions and efforts towards the revival of the Church. Their zeal and passion for the Church are precious attributes that contemporary Christians can learn from, and be encouraged by, in face of issues which need to be dealt with for the renewal of the Church, and for the glory of Christ.