

Is the Church of England even Catholic

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In the early 1970s, the Church Union published 'The Church Travellers Directory' by Father Peter Blagdon-Gamlen. For those of us who were ordinands at this time, and who identified themselves as Anglo-Catholics, this was necessary reading to determine either which Church we may attend, or even which parish we may identify to go as a curate. Fr Peter detailed and coded parishes which evidenced what were then called 'Catholic privileges', namely a daily Mass, main Sunday service as a Eucharist, published times for confessions and the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. The letters DSCR gave an indication which Churches you could safely visit. Just for interest, and at the time, one of my former parishes, Snibston was categorised SCR and St Nicholas' here was also SCR. The only Leicester parishes with full 'privileges' were: St Andrew's (Jarrom Street), St James (Aylestone Park), St Stephen's, St Hugh's (Market Harborough), Narborough, Syston, Whetstone and Wigston Magna. These were safe venues for budding and aspiring Anglo Catholics and the directory was the satnav.

Do any of these categories make any sense today as we seek to recognise the catholicity of the Church of England? Most parishes have the Eucharist as the main Sunday service, and many have continuous reservation, but would not describe or designate themselves as Anglo-Catholic. In fact the term itself has narrowed to the point of relative meaninglessness, as it is often confused with those parishes and priests who oppose the ordination of women. The matters upon which the saintly Bishop King of Lincoln was prosecuted by the Church Association at the end of the nineteenth century included the eastward position, lighted candles on the altar, mixing water with wine, allowing the *agnus dei*, using the sign of the cross at the absolution and blessing, and cleansing the vessels during the service (he was the first bishop to wear a mitre and use Eucharistic vestments, but he was no ritualist). Archbishop Benson acquitted King, except for the sign of the cross and the mixing of water and wine; the eastward position must enable the visibility of the manual acts, and there was an appeal over the

lighted candles but such was deemed to be the responsibility of the incumbent. The 1874 Public Regulation Worship Act resulted in the imprisonment of some clergy, including the infamous Father Tooth of St James', Hatcham. These prosecutions eventually led to a more relaxed and acceptance of many ritual acts under the archiepiscopate of Randall Davidson.

Do any of these issues, including the use of vestments, incense and various forms of ritual define or determine the catholicity of the Church of England? I think not. Even Edward Pusey is photographed with two other ministers before the altar of All Saints', Margaret Street wearing surplice, scarf and hood. There was no greater inspiration for the catholic revival than Pusey, and it was reported that he never celebrated other than 'north end'.

For conciseness, I intend to identify a number of areas that are relevant to our consideration of the catholicity of the Church of England. Of course, such occur within the context of the affirmation of belief as represented in the three catholic creeds (Apostles, Nicene and Athanasius) and affirmed by Article 8 of the 39 Articles. The areas for discussion are:

- The Bible and the early Councils
- The Prayer Book and Ordinal
- The Oxford Movement
- Pope Leo X111
- The contemporary Church and the ecumenical movement

1. There was no single Church that could be called catholic in any sense within the early and embryonic emerging Church. The letters of Paul relate and refer to a variety of ecclesiastical groupings, and it is clear that the gospels were written for differing ecclesiological contexts. It was not even clear if a Church was intended, and whether the Church was a sustainable reality. It was the early councils (7 ecumenical and 4 of particular note and relevance) that were crucial in the evolution of what became the Catholic Church. Nicaea (325) was called by the newly converted Constantine to ensure a monolithic and cohesive Church within a monolithic and cohesive Empire. It was a political

gathering with the purpose of healing the divisions between the Arians and the Athanasians. One had to be defeated, and it was to be the Arians. Although the Nicene Creed took its name from the Council, it was not finalised until the Council of Constantinople in 381. The Catholic Church could be dated from this time. In the declaration of assent which we all have to make, the revelation of the Church is through the catholic creeds and the formularies of the Church of England. The creeds are the Apostles (primarily a baptismal formulary), the Nicene and the Athanasian. The latter can be dated after the Council of Ephesus in 431, and finally redacted after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. I would suggest that our acknowledged and proclaimed catholic roots stem from these creeds and the four named councils.

2. For many, the Reformation was seen as fracturing of the Catholic Church and in England at least, the creation of a new and Protestant Church. However, even with Henry VIII's marital and succession issues, and the break with the authority of the Bishop of Rome, there was continuity of worship, belief and practice. The 1549 Book of Edward VI was recognisable as a translation of the Sarum Mass with some bits changed to reflect Protestant concerns. Even the conservative Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester recognised it as but an amended continuity of what had been familiar. The 1552 Book was a different matter: the restructuring, the break up of the canon of the Mass, the re-ordering (destruction) of Church furnishings, and the significant change in the words at the distribution of communion clearly demonstrated a Zwinglian liturgy that was not recognisably Catholic, but rather most assuredly Protestant. Although the Church retained the 3 fold orders of bishop, priest and deacon, it did so not so much as to affirm an apostolic succession, but rather decent order, and in many respects Episcopal privileges. The book became adored by virtue of its use amongst the continental exiles from the persecutions of Queen Mary. With the accession of Elizabeth in 1558, the 1559 Book was going to be virtually that of 1552, although there is some evidence that Elizabeth would have preferred 1549. She did, however, insist upon the adjunct of the 1549 words of administration together with those of 1552. The use of the surplice was enjoined, also vestments initially (with the cope as an alternative) and the Black Rubric was omitted. The Church of England has no confessional document and states that what it says liturgically

is what it believes. Even the 39 articles do not amount to a confession, but a slightly revised Prayer Book suggests a more Catholic ecclesiology. Elizabeth had a high regard for the orders of the Church (even in spite of later accusations concerning Matthew Parker's consecration and the production of his advertisements), including her dislike of married clergy. The Ordinal, which was appended to the Prayer Book, removed any suggestion that priests became sacrificing priests at Mass, and the traditional symbols were no longer used. The Bible was the key gift at ordinations.

3. In many respects the Oxford Movement of the early nineteenth century, and as a possible re-action to the Evangelical Revival of the late eighteenth century, heralded what was to become known as the Catholic revival in the Church. It is worth noting, however, that the initial impetus was a re-action against Erastianism. John Keble's sermon 'National Apostasy' in St Mary's, Oxford on 14th July, 1833 challenged the right of the Established Church, seen as an arm of the state, to dissolve and merge a number of Irish dioceses. Where resides authority in the Church? The Tracts for the Times set forth a Church with an apostolic heritage and witness. Even Newman's Tract XC suggested that the 39 Articles could be interpreted in a Catholic manner. The Church of England was affirmed as apostolic and in continuation with the Church of the apostles, whatever that might have been. The ritual, associated with the Oxford Movement in fact came later in the century. It was evidenced in slum parishes, and appeal was made to the Ornaments rubric in the Prayer Book, which is somewhat ambiguous. There was a romanticism associated with interest in all things medieval, including the pre-Raphaelite movement and the novels of Walter Scott. There was significant opposition, with an appeal to the fact that the Church of England was a Protestant Church. The Prayer Book controversies of the 1920s brought much of this to the fore, but by now bishops were keen to avoid prosecutions and conflict with parochial clergy. Even Father Hope Patten got away with much at Walsingham in spite of Bishop Pollock's horror! The 1930s witnessed what many would define as the golden era of the Anglo-Catholic movement.
4. A defining moment for the Church of England's self understanding came with Leo X111's Papal Bull 'Apostolicae Curae' issued on 13th September, 1896 in which Anglican Orders were condemned as invalid through defect both of

form and intention. In many respects this appeared to set the seal on any illusion that Anglican ministers were Catholic priests, and that bishops stood within the line of the Apostolic Succession. The form of ordination did, of course, change significantly and observably in the sixteenth century, but the alleged defect of intention is interesting. Roman Catholics would argue that by not demonstrating and believing that ordination conferred a sacerdotal priesthood upon recipients is indicative of the invalidity of Anglican orders and ministry. It is precisely this issue that caused much controversy over the ordination of women to the priesthood and more recently to the episcopate. From the Roman Catholic position, and whatever a significant number of Anglican priests might think or believe, the Bull remains in force. The archbishops of Canterbury and York replied to the Pope (in Latin!) in 1897 repudiating the assumptions of the Bull. They clearly were of the opinion that Anglican ministers were Catholic priests.

5. What then makes the Church of England Catholic? I would want to suggest a number of key and defining points, but would also want to affirm what is not defining. It matters little what the vesture of the minister might be; it matters little with what ritual or ceremony accompanies the performance of the liturgy; it matters little what others may think or seek to impose; even the defect of form makes little difference in respect of ordination and the validity of orders (whatever that might mean, and here lies the problem for our Forward in Faith brothers and sisters). The defect of intention is very difficult if not impossible to objectively quantify: some will believe one thing; others will believe something very different. We should not delude ourselves that as far as the majority of the Church is concerned, that is in the form of the Roman and Eastern distinctions, the Church of England possesses some marks of a Church, but is not Catholic in that it is not in communion with these disciplines.

- I would suggest that the prime determinant of catholicity is that of the celebration and primacy of the Eucharist. The breaking and sharing of bread and wine around the Lord's Table conforms to both the dominical command and to the Anglo-Catholic cry, 'It's the Mass that matters'. If Fr Blagdon-Gamlen was producing his directory today, he would have to include possibly the vast majority of churches with his

category of S. The other catholic reality that defines the Church is the recognition not just of the presence of Christ within the Eucharistic action and forms of bread and wine, but also the consequence of what we do. No Mass can be an act of self-indulgence, something we just get some liturgical high upon. The Mass demands social and political action. It was the great Anglo-Catholic, Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar who opined that you cannot celebrate the presence of Christ within the sacrament without celebrating his presence in the poor. Such is a Catholic witness; such acknowledges the essential link between Christ's sacramental presence and our action within the world. The form of the presence, of course, varies within our tradition, but Catholics will always recognise the reality of Christ's body and blood in the consecrated elements.

- I would also suggest that the retention of the historic episcopate is a Catholic definition of the nature of the Church; this is more than just the *esse bene*, it is essential and necessary. There is an apostolic dimension even if there may not be a literal apostolic succession. The Porvoo Agreement, with the mutual recognition of orders, is interesting in that although the Swedish Church claims apostolic succession, the Danish and other Scandinavian churches broke with bishops and then re-instated an Episcopal order. This might provide some precedent in ecumenical relations with non-Episcopal churches. The ecumenical context is further illustrated through convergent liturgies and lectionaries. The universal dimension of catholicity is evidenced by a common (or nearly) liturgy and readings. The matter of convergent relations with Rome and the East has progressed but still stumbles upon the altar of the recognition of orders and sacramental intention.
- Finally, the simple fact that every Anglican congregation affirms a belief in the 'One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' is indicative of the Church of England's catholicity, together with the declaration of assent confirming belief in the catholic creeds confirms the Church's status of being Catholic. The expressions witnessed in the 39 Articles

of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer, whilst challenging certain aspects of medieval religion and practice do not provide an insuperable obstacle to the catholic nature of our Church.