

Charles C. Grafton, Bishop and Theologian

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ON THE FEAST of S. John the Evangelist 1866 three men took this vow in one another's presence in the suburb of Oxford known as Cowley. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. I promise and vow to Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, before the whole company of heaven and before you, my fathers, that I will live in celibacy, poverty and obedience as one of the mission priests of S. John the Evangelist unto my life's end. So help me God." Two of the men were English, Richard Meux Benson and Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill. One was an American, Charles Chapman Grafton, and it is to him that I am devoting this lecture. I chose this subject partly because his part in the founding of the Cowley Fathers was a significant bond in the history of the Church in England and in America, partly because he had subsequently a creative role in the story of the American Church, and partly because he has things to say to us still as a theologian and a man of God.

Charles Grafton was born on April 12, 1830, the son of Major Joseph Grafton and his wife Ann Maria in Boston, and after his early school days he entered the Harvard Law School at the age of twenty-one. At the time the Church of the Advent in Boston was growing in influence, albeit under persecution, in the incipient Catholic revival, and young Grafton fell under this influence through the teaching of the curate Oliver S. Prescott. This led on to his confirmation and eventually to his ordination by Bishop Whittingham of Maryland, a saintly man who was more in sympathy with him than the contemporary Bishop of Massachusetts. He was curate of S. Paul's Church, Baltimore, from 1859 to 1865, and during his time there the Civil War broke out bringing distress and loss of life in the immediate surroundings. Grafton hated slavery and his sympathies were with the North. and he spent much time ministering to the wounded. His life's work began in that atmosphere of conflict and distress. He was ready for strenuous things.

Presently Grafton felt the call to be a monk, to devote himself to the service of Christ in poverty and simplicity, and he opened his heart to his Father-in-God who encouraged him and advised him to go to England and study the Religious Life there. So to England he came in 1865 when he was thirty-five years old. It was a time of new stirrings in the English Church. The Catholic revival was spreading to the parishes. Priests like Father Lowder at S. Peter's London Docks were at work. Dr. Pusey's influence was strong. Grafton stayed in England five years and found himself drawn into a circle which influenced him all his life. He came to know Pusey, John Mason Neale and the young Charles Wood who later became Lord Halifax. He worked in the East End of London with Father Lowder for a time. He shared in the planning of a great mission to the people of London. Most important of all he met a number of ardent young priests who like himself were being drawn towards the Religious Life, and he took part, by his own lifelong vow, in the foundation of the Society of S. John the Evangelist, the Cowley Fathers. It is hard to doubt that under God Grafton received from his time in England much for which the American Church has cause to be thankful in the subsequent years. But it is also hard to doubt that by his ardent spirit of self-sacrifice he gave much to his English contemporaries, and just when we have been celebrating the centenary of the Cowley Fathers it is fitting for us in England to acknowledge the part taken by this fearless young American priest.

Back in America Grafton was made Rector of the Church of the Advent, Boston. Here was a novel sight in the Protestant Episcopal Church in America—a parish run by monks. With Grafton were Hall who became Bishop of Vermont, Osborne who became Bishop of Springfield and Gardner who was afterwards President of Nashotah House. The American membership of the Cowley Fathers grew only very slowly. There were difficulties, not only episcopal but also within the Constitution of the Community, about the relation between American and English jurisdictions, and to Grafton's utmost grief it proved the only solution for him and his American brethren to leave the Cowley Community. The breach with the Cowley Brotherhood in England, made as it was in charity and through intense pressure of conscience, was an overwhelming grief to Grafton. Years afterwards he writes:—

“Looking back one can see one's own failings, and believe much was owing to misunderstanding and the craftiness of Satan. Very few Americans joined us, and we were pressed with the objection that we were a society under a Superior not a member of the American Church. A question having arisen concerning our duty,

the Americans felt that loyalty to their own Bishops, by virtue of their ordination vows, took precedence. It was a very painful time. I had to bear much harsh treatment and that from old friends. ... I felt I was like a doormat on which everyone was wiping his muddy boots. My great desire for the soul's progress had come to naught. The harm done was a great pain to me. I retired to my little brick-lined cell, sick at heart, and could only take refuge in God. . . . God knew how I had failed in many ways; how strong self, with all its ambitions and desires was; how necessary it was for my heart and will to be humbled and crushed. One can, in old age, be thankful for it all. No one sorrow or pain would one miss. It helped me, made me more real, somewhat emptied me of self, and wrought a spirit of charity in me." (*A Journey Godward*, pp. 69-70)

It was thus through intense tribulation that the Religious Life grew in the American Church. But meanwhile Grafton had founded the order of Sisters known as the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity. And in 1882 the new order of American Cowley Fathers came into being. Today religious orders of men and of women have their place in the American Church as in every part of the Anglican Communion. In the total history Grafton's part will be remembered with thankfulness.

In 1889, the year when the significant volume of essays entitled *Lux Mundi* was published in England, Grafton was elected second Bishop of the see of Fond du Lac. So began an episcopate which lasted until his death on August 30, 1912. It was a young missionary diocese with only eighteen active clergy and much poverty and distress. In order to save money for the diocese Grafton lived in two rooms. But he soon rejoiced in the creation of new parishes and schools, in the foundation of Grafton Hall as a school for girls, in the bringing of the Community of the Holy Nativity to a new mother house within the diocese, in much pastoral work amongst the Indians in the northern part of Wisconsin. He was an austere, autocratic, strong-willed Father-in-God. He made his own ideals prevail, and his directions to the parishes about ceremonial and pastoral discipline were more minute and thorough than we can imagine in any English diocese, and perhaps in any other American diocese either. His principles translated themselves into rule and system both in things inward and in things outward. But beneath it all there was a rare self-dedication to Christ and an almost theological sense such as belongs only to a true student and teacher. It is to Grafton's spirituality and theology that I now pass.

Grafton's collected writings are to be found in a series of eight volumes published by Longmans, Green and Co. in New York near the

end of his life. The most interesting is his autobiography, entitled rather self-consciously *A Journey Godward*. It is a remarkable collection of spiritual confessions, wise counsels and theological comments as well as a record of events and personalities in England and America. It also describes some exciting adventures. For instance there is the tale of how Grafton and his friend Prescott before coming to England to test their vocations felt called to a time of retreat in a hut on Long Island, and during that time the Confederate forces invaded the island with some embarrassing incidents. Some of the volumes contain lectures, sermons and letters. One is a substantial theological treatise entitled *Christian and Catholic*. It is still well worth reading and contains deep and searching exposition of the Incarnation and the Atonement, the nature of the Church and the place of the Anglican Church within Christendom.

Grafton's spiritual counsels spring from his own interior struggles, the struggle between his own imperious temperament and the call to humility, the struggle to see pain and disappointment as a way of being near to the Crucified. He writes:—

“Working for our good, God has sent checks and disappointments and afflictions. Love sent them all. They were all for one end. There is only one safe resting-place for the heart of man, and that is the will of God. Thither He would woo us, thither constrain us. Oft-times He withholds His spiritual favours, that, like the bride in the Canticles, we may arise and with self-abandonment seek Him.”

The self-abandonment is seen in the prayers which Grafton used. Here is a very characteristic one, used by him through many years:—

“O God, dearest and best, may the increase of thy accidental glory be the chief end of my life. May thy ever-blessed will be the law of my being and of all my actions and desires. May thy transforming and uniting love be the permanent and imperative motive of all my actions, duties, labours, thoughts and words. May the life of my blessed Lord be the model and mould of my own, that being melted by penitence I may be recast and reunited in thee. May thy Holy Spirit so rule and govern . . . that I may rest peacefully in thee and be an instrument for the conversion of others.” (*A Journey Godward*, p. 63)

Humour comes into his spiritual counsels:—

“Some venial sins will always be committed, just as some dust will be settling on our carpets. It is not wise in the latter case to seek the removal of the dust by picking it up with a pin, but to give the

carpet a good sweeping.” (*A Journey Godward*, p. 137)

Here is a counsel about going into retreat. I think it is today the greatest need in both our Churches, American and English:—“It is the still lake that reflects the heavens, so it is the still soul that is receptive of God’s inspiration. Therefore those retreats given to clergy in which the idea of a conference is mingled fail of their intended effect. All conversation amongst the clergy should cease during the retreat.” (*A Journey Godward*, p. 131)

Theologically, Grafton expounded the Incarnation in the way that one would expect of a teacher who had learned from Pusey, Liddon and R. M. Benson. His exposition is however far more scriptural than patristic in mode, and he draws out movingly the true humanity of Our Lord in his temptations, his dereliction and his death. But he is uncompromising on the deity of the Lord and the miracles:—

“As we cannot suppose God would send a teacher into the world to undo His own work and lead the world back into idolatry, we must either give up Christ as teacher in any way sent from God, or else admit that divine worship is rightly paid to Him because He is God.” (*Christian and Catholic*, p. 45)

“What wonder that when He was born all creation was present at His birth to honour it. ... What wonder too when He entered on His work all creation honoured Him as its Lord.” (*Christian and Catholic*, pp. 69-70)

All the more moving then is Christ’s identification of Himself with the darkness of sinful humanity in the Passion. Grafton’s account of Gethsemane and the dereliction has the depth of Newman’s great sermon on “The Mental Sufferings of Christ” but a simplicity which Newman’s eloquence lacks. The essence of atonement, however, is not penal suffering but a victorious representative sacrifice by which we are cleansed and in which we can be offered to God in a life centred in the Eucharist.

Deeply orthodox as he was Grafton was no fundamentalist. He was perhaps too rooted in the teaching of the second generation of the Tractarians to become exactly a disciple of Charles Gore and the *Lux Mundi* school, but he had moved that way in a frank acceptance of post-Darwinian evolutionary ideas:—“To deny what is called the Darwinian theory of the evolutionary process is as unwise as to deny the truth of the world’s orbit round the sun. The discovery of the law of progress in the natural world is in favour of the doctrine of the progressive development

of man in and through the Incarnate Lord into a final union with God which secures sinlessness and eternal life. The grand mistake of Rome is not only its denial of the truth revealed in nature and discovered by science but its theory that God, having made a perfect being who fell away by sin, came and died in order to restore man to his former condition. There is a partial truth in this. But the larger one is that God in spite of man's sinfulness came to forgive and lift him up to a higher state of union and life in Himself than he had had before. In the Incarnate One creation advances to its completion." (*A Journey Godward*, pp. 183-184)

Do we not see here the forecast of much theological development? I find myself murmuring the name Teilhard de Chardin. I would also cite a perhaps startling encomium which Grafton wrote about the contributions of Broad Church theology in the last century. In a paper on *The Rise of Ritualism* in his Fond du Lac Tracts Grafton, while complaining of the vagaries of Jowett in England and Stopford Brooke in America, wrote of "the theological genius of Maurice, the brilliant sermons of Robertson and the chiselled delicacy of Dean Stanley's thought":—

"The movement did good and is still doing it. It created a profitable discontent with inherited apologetics, formerly serviceable but now useless. It helped to demonstrate that no dogma of the Catholic faith is contradicted by any recognized scientific fact. It disillusioned men from a belief in the mechanical theory of verbal scriptural inspiration. By the controversy concerning eternal punishment many came to know the Church's doctrine of a future, purificative, progressive state, and it made prayers for the dead acceptable to Protestants. It started the Church on new courses of philanthropy. The sword of the faith gleamed with victorious light, as it seemed forged anew." (*Fond du Lac Tracts*, pp. 367-368)

Grafton adds: "A new comprehensive school is arising. It is too soon to outline its proposals or its hopes." These are not the words of a partisan or of a static mind.

Now for the Church and its unity. Grafton believed that the Holy Spirit had been inspiring a revival of Catholic faith and life within the Anglican Communion while in the same period the modern Church of Rome had been resisting the Holy Spirit by its trend to ultramontanism and isolation. He was vehemently anti-Roman. "The Holy Spirit", he said, "has been pleading with the Roman Church, calling it back to primitive doctrine and true catholicity, and it has rejected the Spirit's guidance and become more Papal." He wrote a Pastoral entitled "The Sin of joining the

Roman Catholic Church”, and he even said:—“As the sin of schism lies with that party that compels withdrawal, by demanding uncatholic or uncanonical terms of communion, the Church of Rome is in schism everywhere. She is in schism in the city of Rome, though not equally and for the same reasons that she is in London.” (*Christian and Catholic*, p. 360)

It was towards the Holy Orthodox Church of the East that Grafton specially turned. In 1903 Grafton visited Russia, accompanied by W. J. Birkbeck, an English layman who had a lifelong interest in the Russian Orthodox Church. He had many conversations with Russian ecclesiastics and attended the Liturgy in many churches and was deeply moved. “My own impression,” he wrote, “corresponds with that of the late Bishop Creighton that the Russians are the most religious nation in Europe. While it may be said that the English are the most practical, the French the most logical, the Germans the most learned, the Italians the most artistic and the Americans the most freedom-loving, it may fairly be said of Russia that as a nation she is the most religious.” (*A Journey Godward* p. 255.) For myself, having visited Russia twice, I would say that fifty years of persecution and suppression have not been able to kill the spirit of religion amongst the Russian people. But Grafton, not content with impressions, during and after his visit grappled in a scholarly way with the doctrinal issues of Eastern Orthodoxy and shewed an understanding of them which is not too common amongst Anglicans. He warmed to the Orthodox Church as standing for a non-Papal catholicity. He welcomed the Eastern doctrine as being more mystical than legal or institutional:—

“The Eastern idea of the Church is not of a body culminating in one visible representative of Christ to whom obedience is due; but the Church is one spiritual organism, embracing all Church members in heaven and earth, united sacramentally to the indwelling Lord and united to one another by divine charity.” (*Fond du Lac Tracts*, No. VI “The Reunion of Oriental and Anglican Churches”).

He believed that the Eastern veneration for Blessed Mary and the saints saw them as fellow worshippers with us within the one Body of Christ, invoking one another and praying for one another, and that this conception was free from the Latin tendency to regard the saints as mediators supplementing the mediatorship of Christ. He held that the American liturgy with its more explicit sacrificial language and its invocation of the Holy Spirit was more intelligible to the Easterns than the English liturgy. He called frankly for the removal of the *Filioque* clause as

being, however theologically defensible, an unlawful Western addition to the Creed. He went so far in forthrightness as to say:—

“We must not wait for its removal by England’s Church, prevented as she is by the State from taking any action, but the free Church of America must lead the way. For my own part I think the right and straightforward course is to remove it.”

I do not know how far the American Church today shares that view, for I see a stout defence of the *Filioque* clause on theological grounds in Dr. Macquarrie’s work *Principles of Christian Theology*.

What of the non-episcopal Protestant Churches? Grafton had no enthusiasm for union with them. He did not believe that the basis for union with them at present existed. Indeed he voiced a general doubt in his mind as to whether the visible, ecclesiastical union of all Christians was going to be accomplished in this world at all. In a striking passage in his autobiography he disclosed this thought about the final future of the Church:—

“How do we know that it is His will that the separated portions of Christendom should be united? . . . What is to be, according to the divine will, the course of the Church on earth? It is not to conquer the world and to make the world good. It is to gather out of the world those who are to form the Kingdom of Righteousness which is to last for ever. The world is in opposition to Christ and will become more so as time goes on. The world will treat the Church as it treated Christ. It will gain a foothold within the Body of the Church itself, which will be the source of its division. Christianity as a world’s victor will be a failure. Its true victory will be found in its faith in Christ, which will not thereby be disturbed. . . . The sign of the Cross, that is persecution, will be seen. The outward garment of Christ will be rent by divisions. . . . We cannot say that it is God’s will that the different portions of disunited Christendom will ever be united.” (*A Journey Godward*, pp. 247-249)

Grafton was not denying the union of Christians in Christ’s mystical body through the sacraments. That was the imperishable reality. He was, in this apocalyptic passage, querying the final hope of expressing this unity in visible structure. His thought is not always consistent. If these sentences are akin to some of Our Lord’s warnings in His apocalyptic teaching, they are less near to the Epistle to the Ephesians. Nor do they exclude Grafton’s ardent hopes concerning the unity of the Anglican and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, for after passing on to a vehemently anti-

Roman polemic—“We must pray for Rome’s conversion, but only a moral earthquake, as terrible as the physical one which smashed Messina, can shatter the Papacy and make possible a reunion with her”—he turns hopefully to the East, “The Eastern Church does not ask us to submit. In her great love she only asks ‘Are we of the same faith?’ ... If we are one with her in faith, then she opens her heart and says ‘we are brethren’.”

Such were the main lines of Bishop Grafton’s spiritual and theological teaching. Trained in the stern Tractarian school he brought much of the Tractarian spirit into the American Church in the latter part of the last century, and his role was creative in the development of the Religious Life and in the vision of unity between East and West. While he must have appeared to many as a tough partisan he was too devoted to Christ Crucified to think of any ecclesiastical system in a triumphalist way, and in his grasp of the relation of evolution and creation he pointed forward to the more liberal Catholicism of later decades. I want now to ask what he and his teaching have to say to use today.

Nashotah House meant much to him. In his early years in England he writes: “Will you not do me the kindness of procuring for me some good account of Nashotah? It is the only very church-like thing I know of. Any facts concerning it. A note to the Principal would do it. I am to give a lecture on the American Church.” (*Letters and Addresses*, p. 58, November 3, 1865.) Here is a letter written to Prescott during his episcopate: “We know you would so enjoy the sight of the new buildings along the Bluff of the lake, with the stone cloister 226 feet long, and opening into the chapel, which adds to the vista. ... It is like a new place, with the old spirit back in it. The Professors live together and with the students. It is about the only place where ritualism is not talked about. There is a spirit of reality, order, devotion and study about the House.” (p. 117, January 1, 1894). A few years later we find him writing: “I obtained a legacy for Nashotah House of 350,000 dollars” (p. 154, February 17, 1910). And then in the last year of his life: “I look to Nashotah along with some of the other seminaries as the hope of the coming Catholicity of the Church” (p. 158, March 8, 1911). He loved your house, and cherished it. But how does his message stand today?

The scene has altered in ways which Grafton never dreamed of. That a Second Vatican Council should do so much in the recovery of a primitive, scriptural and patristic Catholicity would have greatly startled him, as indeed it has startled many. The collegiality of Peter and the whole episcopate, the setting of Mariology in the context of the doctrine of the Church, the recovered emphasis upon the sharing of all the baptised in the

Body of Christ, the recognition of the positive significance of the non-Roman Catholic Communion—all these we have seen happening within Rome. The œcumenical scene has changed. Nor does it diminish our own regard for the integrity of the Catholic faith if we in a like spirit acknowledge more vividly the positive significance of the non-episcopal Protestant Communion. How Grafton would have gasped—and rejoiced—at an open meeting between a Pope and an Archbishop of Canterbury, greeting one another and calling for theological dialogue between the two Communion and for relations of honour, respect and charity between all the members of both.

So too the theological and cultural scene has changed. It is not possible to expound the Catholic Faith exactly in the manner in which Bishop Grafton expounded it. But in the midst of his own very conservative teaching we sow the seeds of new development. As he called for openness towards Darwinism as illuminating the doctrine of creation, so we find ourselves called to openness towards the problems of history and symbol, of new modes of theological language in which to express the unchanging truths of the divine Word-made-flesh, and the glory of the Triune God.

Yet amidst these intellectual changes it still stands true that God is made known to us and makes His home within us not through the cleverness of our brains and of our talk but by the road of prayer and contemplation, of penitence and self-discipline. Here Grafton's message stands, and he lived it as one who died and his life was hid with Christ in God. Not least is the message urgent for those who are called to be priests in the Church of God. They are called to openness: openness to the world around them in sympathy, in compassion, in understanding of the contemporary scene: openness to the treasures of the past ages of Christianity: and above all openness to God in the humility of the creature before his creator, the sinner in the presence of his saviour. It is when the heart of a priest has been broken by Christ's love and his will broken in Christ's obedience that he brings the knowledge of Christ to the people whom he serves.