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"High Church"

A. Appleton Packard, O.H.C.



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13TH THOUSAND

“High Church”

“MY FAMILY and I were always ‘low to medium’ Churchmen. But when Christ Church became ‘high’ we moved to another parish.” A woman told me that not long ago. It’s typical of the business of “low” and “high” Church which mystifies outsiders and insiders within the Episcopal Church. I’ve been asked: “Are there *two* Episcopal Churches in America, the high and the low?” Some people used to say that the Protestant Episcopal was “the High branch” of the Methodist Episcopal! In this paper we think what “High Church” really means, give something of its history, with the opposite “Low Church.” Then we consider the “degeneration” to which a fine term has arrived, and challenge the position many take that these “High Church” practices are innovations in the Anglican Communion of which the American Episcopal Church is part. But let me emphasize strongly that “Low” and “High” are both fundamentally at unity within Episcopalian-

ism. There is only *one* Episcopal Church, no matter what differences appear among its parishes. The Reformed Episcopal Church, a sect which began in 1873, is the sole "low" offshoot of the Episcopal Church, and is properly ranked among Protestant denominations.

I

HOW did "High Church" originate? Back of "*high* Church" lay a trio of nicknames dealing with "flying"! "High-flyer, High-flying, or High-flown Churchmen" characterized persons and groups within our Mother Church of England in the last quarter of the seventeenth and first of the eighteenth centuries. Read it in the history of that period and see what was going on. In 1680 the earliest reference is to English clergy who held deep-seated loyalty to Crown and Church. Someone depicted "the honest Divines (clerics) of the Church of England who for their Conscience and Obedience are Branded for High-Flyers." Partisan lines were drawn by the next year so "low" men called their opponents "tories, . . . high-flown

churchmen." These Churchmen were guilty of strong opinions and feelings supporting claims of *authority* in Church and State. A "high-flyer or high-flier" had lofty or "high-flown" notions on questions of government, especially church government. In the last year of the 1600s an opponent said "the High-Flyers talk and act as if they thought the Kingdom of God was nothing else but Circumstance and Ceremony." That sounds like a modern gibe. Such accusers forget that care for outward things is essential for upholding State and Church as God's instruments. In religion, a *high* valuation is set upon everything dealing with the approach to the Divine Majesty. A good answer came in 1718: "I am afraid St. Peter and St. Paul will scarce escape being censured for Tories and High-Flyers." Conversions from "lower" to "higher" Churchmanship were steady. In 1814 a man "from a sullen sectarian . . . turned a flaming high-flyer for the 'supreme dominion of the Church.'" As late as 1897 a distinguished writer in England remarked upon the "great mortification to the high-flying Anglican who cannot bring himself to believe that there can be two Churches within the

realm at one and the same time." Only too true. This double word "high-flying" was used up to the end of Victoria's reign.

Soon after "high-flyer" appeared, human nature being what it is, as it's more natural to use one word in popular speech where two are correct (as in "*Roman Catholic*"), "fly" dropped out, and "high" remained as equal in meaning. We may define the High Churchman as a member of the Anglican Communion throughout the world holding opinions which give a HIGH place to the authority of the Episcopate, Priesthood, and Sacraments. Generally he emphasizes those points of doctrine, discipline, ritual, and ceremonial by which the Anglican Church is distinct from Protestantism such as Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it meant those who believed that Episcopacy—governing by Bishops of Apostolic Succession—is "of the law" of God. They opposed any compromise with Protestantism on differences in Church government. And "high Church" in religion was practically the same then as "Tory"—royalist conservative in politics. At

first a hostile nickname, after the later invention of opposite "Low Churchman," it began to be accepted for its own sake.

Apparently "High Church" was taken from "High Churchman," the personal emphasis being first in time. A writer of 1744 dealt with "those of the Clergy who began now (1700-02) to be called the High-Church (party), set up a complaint all over England of the want of Convocations." This refers to the government's suppression of the ancient law-making bodies of the Church which were silenced for a century and a half. A Church historian wrote of "those men who began now (anno 1704) to be called the high church party"—a couple of years one way or the other made no difference. A bold spirit of 1704 recorded: "I venture, for it's a Venture at this Time, to own the name of an High-Church-Man. No man thinks it a Disparagement to be High, that is Zealous, in any good thing." Add this of 1708: "A High-Church Clergyman is a Holy-Man in his Conversation"—praise indeed! By 1710 it was asserted: "Several of the High Church are for a Union between the Church of England and the Church of

Rome." A decade later Italy was named "that Seat of High-Churchship"(!). Our Anglican Bishops at Lambeth in 1920 reminded us that there could be no Church unity without the Roman Church of the West. While High or Catholic-minded Churchmen in Anglicanism always stress what is held in common with Rome (and succeed year by year in breaking down blind prejudice against her), they claim that this great Church of ours is fully Catholic in and of itself. She too is *universal*, holding identical Faith, Ministry, Sacraments, and Tradition with Roman Catholics. Yet we hold them without the additions and distortions they sanction.

Since 1833, when British clergy led by John Keble began the Oxford Movement at that University (not to be confused with Buchmanite "Oxford Groups"), the name "High Church" was used of this Catholic Revival within the Anglican Church. J. H. Newman and E. B. Pusey were its leaders. It was dubbed "Puseyism," and often "Tractarianism" because of ninety famous tracts spread widely to propagate its principles. The opinions of newer High Churchmen were close to those

of the earlier men of the same nickname, although closer to the pre-Reformation Church in ceremonial observances. They've long since grown away from conservative loyalty to royalty and outmoded political views. Archbishop Tait of Canterbury wrote in 1882: "... powerfully had the early teaching of Newman represented English High Churchmanship as the best barrier against the Church of Rome." In 1845 Newman did "go to Rome," and a trickle of others have done so; nevertheless an equal if not greater group join us from there. The true position of this part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as Catholic but not Roman is the strongest one in Christendom.

II

What about "Low Church?" This means an Anglican Churchman holding opinions giving a LOW place to the authority of Episcopate, Priesthood, Sacraments, and Church organization. The word was invented as opposing "High Churchman," and came into use during the early part of

the eighteenth century as equal to "Latitudinarianism." This mouth-filling word meant wide latitudes in religious belief. A writer of 1708 "shows the first rise of that party which were afterwards called Latitudinarians, and are at this day our 'Low-Churchmen.'" Later it fell into disuse, but was revived in the 1800s when "High Churchmen" obtained new currency as applied to those of the Oxford Movement. "Low Churchman" has usually been equivalent to "Evangelical"—emphasis on the saving Gospel of Christ—and was used but rarely of "Broad Churchmen." A common quip ran: "Low Church lazy; Broad Church hazy; High Church crazy." Many would prefer to "be crazy about" or "in love with" Our Lord and everything His Church stands for, than be guilty of laziness in thought and activity, or haziness in doctrine and devotion!

"Having the Imputation of Fanaticism and Low-Church fixt upon them" was a description of 1702. Daniel Defoe of "Robinson Crusoe" fame remarked in 1703: "We have had it Printed with an Assurance I have wondered at, That the moderate Members of the Church of England, call'd Low

Church Men, are worse than the Dissenters." Low Churchmen have been the Church's left-wingers (the High being in middle and on right) who held out hands to Protestantism as High Churchmen did to Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. A Bishop noted in 1715: "All of the clergy that treated the Dissenters with temper and moderation . . . were called Low Churchmen." In 1704 someone wrote: "They (the Low-Church) profess themselves ready to joyn with the Dissenters in Confederacy against the High-Church." Yet in 1710 Joseph Addison declared: "The Terms High-Church and Low-Church, as commonly used, do not so much denote a Principle, as they distinguish a Party." Few deserved a remark the same year: "He . . . is known to be so wretched a low Churchman, as to dispute all the Articles of the Christian Faith." In a satire of 1715 a supposed Frenchwoman Mrs. Centlivre fears: "If dese plaguey Low-Church get de Day,—dey vill make it Treason for any one to send der Children to France, Begar." A "Continental tour" education was to be denied by those afraid of infection from Romanism. Even in 1841 the Earl of Shaftesbury shows that "The

Low Church, as they are called, will believe and will preach too, that Popery is encouraged and promoted."

Low Churchmen are inclined to be fearful with an inferiority complex, claiming High Churchmen are "selling us out" to the Pope. It's never been true. Instead, the growingly healthy spiritual condition of the nearly 40,000,000 Anglicans in our eleven widespread Churches is due, under God, to the truths emphasized by old "high and dry" Churchmen. These were succeeded in the last century by the newer ones whose zeal and love re-awakened Anglicanism to the glories of her Apostolic and Catholic—not narrowly Roman—heritage. The conviction of this paper is that the "Low Churchman" is an *undeveloped* Churchman. Most of his dislikes of "High Church" are being removed by explanation, reading, and the converted lives of those thousands in the Episcopal Church who take her seriously as the best current exponent of Christianity. Yet the Catholic-minded Churchman MUST balance in his thinking and observances the Evangelical "Good News" of the Cross of mankind's Saviour, and personal devotion

to Him—all *within* the Body of Christ, His Church. It's far more than a matter of names. It is a question of objective truth. This *is* advancing. More Churchpeople every year thank God that from self-satisfied "low" Episcopalianism they have responded to the call to "go up higher" into nearer contact with Jesus by ALL the spiritual opportunities available in "this Church" and her treasured Book of Common Prayer.

III

Having seen a bit of the history and meaning of "high" and "low" Church, we should recognize that a noble term "High Church" has degenerated in most quarters into nonsense. When asked: "What does 'High Church' mean?" a good if facetious answer is: "Anything that we are not used to at our parish." Ceremonial is often adopted by well-meaning parsons and parishioners for no theological reasons. The absence or presence of ceremonial—externals of worship—is not always the fruit of theological understanding. Frequently it results from ignorance.

There are many "local rites" which don't make sense, are out of proportion, and possess no liturgical basis in authorized and widely-accepted standards of public worship. You find them everywhere. I don't plead for uniformity, but for omitting wonderful oddities which become harmful by drawing attention to molehills instead of mountains, causing concentration on minor matters where major ones need constant emphasis. Look at the solemnities concerning money collections in Episcopal Churches. That's one place where simplicity could be inculcated. There's no rhyme or reason to them. To this "high church" has descended. The essence of the word, as applied unthinkingly to cover these "processionals" and so on, means no more nor less than what one is brought up to. If I'm not accustomed to candles on the altar, two are "high." If two was my limit, six are "sky-high." I challenge any accusation that these are minute matters with which we should be ashamed to deal. For *they*, not basic, true doctrines, occupy most people's minds in our churches to the driving out of really important affairs.

We in the Order of the Holy Cross are frank to

admit that we emphasize the "High" rather than "Low" side. But what we and any REAL High Churchman should be concerned with, is the welfare of the *whole* Church, not of any part or party within it. To over-emphasize just what distinguishes you from your ecclesiastical neighbor is to run the danger of developing a sectarian attitude. Catholicism itself means wholeness, universality. Let's pray, think, work, in terms of our common Faith, all of it, our common Worship, all of it, and our common Love as members of the whole Body of the whole Christ.

The REAL High Churchman is one who has tremendous personal devotion to our Lord through His own Catholic and Apostolic Church of which Anglicanism is an integral part. What makes many of us sick and tired is the Episcopalian who loves colors, incense, lights, crossings, vestments, "that beautiful service," yet has no appreciation of the necessity for discipline. The right sense of proportion is illustrated by a dear old man of "low" upbringing making a careful, humble Confession, then asking the confessor to give him advice on using the sign of the cross! This priest gladly re-

assured him about not being "ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified" by this outward symbol of our Salvation. That's the true emphasis. Most Episcopalians are inclined to start from the outside in, from lesser to greater. Take care of your penitence in Confession. Prepare carefully before and give humble thanks after Holy Communion. Make fasting Communion. Observe the Prayer Book fasting and abstinence days. Worship regularly at least Sunday by Sunday, "on the Lord's Day, in the Lord's House, at the Lord's Service"—Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer has all the essentials there from High Mass to the Seven Sacraments. Study, know, use it.

One more thing. That Prayer Book on its title page refers to the Church's "rites and ceremonies." This enables us to correct a misnomer. Beyond being named "Puseyites," "Tractarians," "Romanizers,"—"Ritualist" has often been flung at High Churchmen. "Ceremonialist" is what was meant. As Webster's Collegiate Dictionary puts it: "A rite is a prescribed form of conducting a ceremony especially a religious one; a ritual for a religious service." This means the printed authorized form.

Ritual is "a form of conducting worship"; ceremonial "a code of ceremonies observed, or a book containing ceremonial forms." Ritual may in the plural stand for "a ceremonial act, as performing the last rites." Properly a ritualist is one "attached to, skilled in, an advocate of, ritual. Ceremonial applies only to things, ceremonies to persons and things. Ceremonies are the series of acts, often symbolical, prescribed by the rite, namely the authority, custom, law" in these fields. For example, in Confirmation, the Book of Common Prayer describes this sacramental *rite*. The *ceremonies* include the actions of the ministers and people. Let's distinguish correctly between the two. After all, the Prayer Book does.

IV

One of the best histories of the Church of England is by H. O. Wakeman. In his chapter "The Ascendancy of Latitudinarianism" (see translation above!), he tells how in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries "lethargy, like a malarious fog, crept up the body of the

Church and laid its cold hand upon her heart." "Low" and "Broad" Churchmen were in power. After those decades of indifferent Churchmanship, the "low" cries out: "Why these innovations the new Rector makes? Why imitate the Roman Catholics—can't we be true to ourselves? Hasn't something new been added? Didn't we get along well without them for four hundred years since the glorious Reformation, when Roman corruptions and Papal superstitions were thrown out by enlightened Protestants?"

The REAL High Churchman replies: "Innovations? But—are they?" A "very extreme Protestant" of the nineteenth century, the Rev. Dr. J. E. Riddle, provides ammunition to spike the guns of his fellow Low Churchmen. Is it Prayers for the Dead? American experiences in two World Wars softened thousands of hearts into gladly praying for the souls of loved ones. The late Bishop Brown of "low" Virginia was responsible for the effective conclusion of the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church in the Eucharist, asking God "to grant them (the faithful departed) continual growth in Thy love and service." Dr. Riddle in his

"Manual of Christian Antiquities" objects strenuously to such prayers, but acknowledges in the same breath that they have been a Christian custom for seventeen hundred years, and even earlier. Is it the Sign of the Cross? He admits: "The practice of marking the body with the sign of the cross at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper is unquestionably one of the most remote antiquity in the Christian Church. It has generally been supposed to be of Apostolic origin." Innovated—when nineteen hundred years' use sanctifies it? Is it Daily Celebration of the Holy Communion? See the directions of the Prayer Book. While in the 1700s it was celebrated only three or four times a year, we could do much better than at present. I was in a parish on Epiphany where no Mass was planned. Hear Dr. Riddle again: "A daily Celebration seems to have been recommended, and to a certain extent practised, in the ancient Church. It is probably to this that allusion is made in Acts 2:42, 46." Get out your New Testament and look up these passages. Is it Elevation of the Host? "A practice of this kind," our "low Church" author states, "seems to have existed in the Eastern Churches as

early (perhaps) as the fourth century." Is it Incense? Riddle tells us: "Its use in worship was mentioned by St. Hippolytus who died 230, St. Ephrem Syrus (d. 374), St. Basil the Great (d. 379), and St. Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), as in use during and before their time." Is it Vestments (those plus the usual timid black and white minimum)? Riddle quotes Eusebius and Epiphanius, fourth century Church historians, about Apostolic vestments. He adds: "It can hardly be supposed that ministers of the different degrees or orders in the hierarchy which existed in the second and third centuries were not distinguished by different vestments in the discharge of their offices in the congregation." Twelve to eighteen hundred years old! Innovations! The *real* innovators are the so-called reformers who deny the ancient doctrines and usages of Christ's Church.

"High-flier, High-Churchman, Puseyite, Tractarian, Ritualist, Romanizer, Anglo-Catholic"—they're all there. But anyone who is of real significance receives a lot of nicknames and still lives to tell the tale. Look at the numerous names for the Blessed Sacramental Feast: Holy Communion,

Holy Eucharist, Mass, and so on. The service most important to Christian worship, with all its inclusive power, draws them like a magnet. I dare compare it with millions who for generations in Anglicanism are numbered among those who have stood stiffly for the whole Faith for the whole world. It's one thing to admit intellectual acceptance of that Apostolic Faith. It is another—and much harder—to take it out of the study into missions, slums, foreign parts, and over the earth. Glorified Morning Prayer has brought comparatively few the glory and salvation of the Redeemer. It's about time that we became increasingly loyal to the *entire* Truth of Christ in His Church for which fully-developed Anglicanism stands. Let's not be afraid of name-calling, ridicule, misunderstanding. Catholicism is always costly, disciplinary, sacrificial, ever-loving.

The present (1951) Archbishop of Canterbury, leading prelate of our Communion, proclaims with no uncertain voice regarding Anglicans: "We have no doctrine of our own. We only possess the Catholic doctrines of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we

hold without addition or diminution. We stand firm on that rock." To this the *REAL* converted, *high churchman* (let ceremonial eccentricities be "high church") shouts a fervid "Amen." And he dares to practise, in discipline, devotion, and reverent rites and ceremonies, the doctrines he believes with all that is in him.

The Order of the Holy Cross is a monastic community for men in the Episcopal Church.