

Anglo-Catholicism

As we mentioned last week in this column, Anglo-Catholics are Anglicans who particularly treasure the Catholic heritage which has been part of the history of the Church of England for over 1500 years. Although the term itself was coined in the 19th century, there have been representatives of these views ever since the impact of the European Protestant Reformation on the Church, starting from the reign of Edward VI. Tragically this division in the Church of England became politicised and was at least a factor in the Civil War, the martyrdom of Charles I, and the dull austerity of the Commonwealth (1649-1660).

It was, however, the so-called Oxford Movement of the 1830s which saw an awareness and appreciation of the Catholic heritage of the Church come to the fore. People like J H Newman and E B Pusey were the force behind the movement, which has had a profound effect on the Anglican Church.

Look around the Cathedral. Many of the features of our building and of the way we do things stem directly from the ways of thinking and the approach to worship characteristic of Anglo-Catholicism. The seasonal colours, the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, the candles on the altar and below the window in the east wall, the centrality of the Eucharist in our pattern of communal worship, the clergy's use of vestments, our occasional use of incense and bells to mark very special days, the practice of acknowledging the altar by a small bow as we enter or leave, the sign of the cross that many of us make at various points in the liturgy; indeed the value we place on formal liturgy and ritual done well. These are all aspects of the Anglo-Catholic view that worship should be the best we can offer and should involve not just the mind but also the heart and whole person, so gesture, stance, sound, scent, colour, etc. are valued concomitants of the words we say and hear.

Anglo-Catholics believe that the Church of England, and by extension, the daughter churches of the Anglican Communion are part of the 'one holy catholic and apostolic church' in the same way as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of the East, and never abandoned or broke the transmission of this identity from the beginnings of an identifiably English church in the 6th century until the present.

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