



## **The Next Century in Anglican Monasticism**

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Look back more than one hundred and twenty years. On March 26, 1845, two Sisters of the Holy Cross began corporate, community religious life in a house at 17 Park Village West, Regent's Park, London. They were the first Anglican nuns in over three centuries. From this tiny beginning there grew and steadily flourished the great tree of monasticism now firmly planted in the world-wide spiritual garden of Anglicanism.

Look back nearly seventy years. At the opening of the 1900s, a half-century after the life of the Counsels for both men and women was permanently re-established, the greater communities had gained and proved their stability; they were already rooted at home in England and in the outlying provinces of the whole Communion. By this time other communities of less sure foundation had succumbed or were tending towards dissolution. But the tide had turned; secular

opposition waned; ecclesiastical suspicion changed to growing, positive approval. Our Anglican Church had added fresh proof of her all-embracing, essential, fundamental Catholicity, by means of the fertility and fruitage of holy religion.

Look back some thirty years. The ninetieth anniversary of this restoration was kept at Ascot Priory, Ascot, Berkshire. There are located the Sisters of the Society of the Holy Trinity, by lineal descent the oldest of the revived Orders, founded by Mother Lydia Sellon, with which the Holy Cross Sisterhood had amalgamated. March 26, 1935 was observed also by a memorial service at St. Paul's Chapel, Trinity Parish, New York City, with representation of religious and secular clergy and laity. The notes of thankfulness for the past and confidence for the future were struck at Ascot that happy day. *Non nobis, Domine* echoed: "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy Name be praise" for this glorious achievement. Praise rose to God for His unnumbered mercies, His unflinching support, His imperishable love. The Lord had indeed "made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." Remarkable effects had been realized upon the entire spiritual life of this Church—not least affecting the clergy. Christ's counsels of perfection had been taken literally. *Sursum corda!* Why? Because "by their fruits ye shall know them." It was—and is—the fruitfulness of the religious life which has "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Yet these influences and results have flowed, must flow, far beyond the cloistered confines. Over all the earth God is king. He is holy, and everybody and everything in His kingdom must be holy, too.

Look back twenty or more years. In England, Ascot Priory was one of the two central places for observing the centenary. It is significant that on the day of profound thanksgiving, after the morning High Mass, despite the difficulties of wartime conditions, some sixty Sisters representing many communities of women, and a considerable group of religious priests and laymen, constituted the long procession which visited "The Hermitage," Dr. E. B. Pusey's residence and last resting-place. This saintly, learned priest and teacher was the principal pioneer of the Oxford Movement in general, and of the revival of the religious state among us in particular. The other central point, about the same time, was Christ Church, Albany Street, London, where the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Lang of Lambeth, preached at a Solemn Eucharist in the very church

building and parish where the earliest Sisters lived and worked. This commemoration, under the auspices of the English Church Union, was but the chief of several lesser observances. British churchpeople everywhere were made aware of the event through the pages of the religious press.

In America the occasion found its culmination on April 9, 1945, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City, when veritably thousands of people met in honor of the religious life. Church papers gave it wide publicity. And in Honolulu, Spokane, and Chicago—to mention no other far-flung locations—American Churchmen in one way or another rejoiced with full hearts that in *Ecclesia Anglicana* monasticism had returned to stay.

After these four backward glances, let us consider some ways in which—based on past lessons and present realities—we religious of this Church may become more and more effective instruments in the divine hands for Him and our fellow-men. What of the century ahead? One American monk would present humbly a few suggestions to this end.

### **A. Work for Unity**

'Anglican Monasticism,' as a title to include all those living a ruled and (in the majority of cases) vowed life, provides a starting-point. Think of the three prominent branches or divisions of Catholicism. Orthodoxy possesses only Basilian monks, and nuns under a modified rule of the same character. On the other hand, Rome's greatness allows her to glory in innumerable institutes, congregations, orders, and so on, many of them differing greatly, as Jesuits from Carthusians, Carmelites from Sisters of Charity. Anglicans, as Westerns, naturally have followed the Patriarchate of the West in multiplying different families of religious. Hence diversity of family life within the larger unity of the Church marks our religious. So it has been since Benedictines and Augustinians as the sole religious gave place to other types of dedicated vocation; thus it should continue to be in days to come. In a far deeper sense, we in our portion of the complete "Household of Faith" realize keenly the terrible weaknesses of disunity, and our peculiar call in these times—when the world itself is valiantly trying to draw together into *really* 'United Nations'—to a similar and vastly more compelling 'Reunion of Christendom.'

In other words, monasticism like Catholicism is essentially simple, one. As the reunited Body of Christ will emphasize its universality and less its English, Greek, and Roman characteristics, so in the same way there will eventuate a smaller proportion of *Anglican* monasticism—as distinguished from Roman or Eastern—and a larger measure of monasticism conceived of as Dominican, Franciscan, or even eclectic modern American groups, in world-wide entities. World-views will replace narrowly nationalistic viewpoints.

Because we may reasonably expect such developments in monasticism accompanying the drawing together of now disparate parts of the One Church, so we can and must hasten the attainment of this objective by our combined, strenuous efforts for unity among Christians. This task must be put in the forefront of all we religious think, do, and say. As *the* 'pray-ers' and workers shoulder to shoulder with—and by our calling, beyond—our brethren in the world, we have made real contributions to this supreme cause and ought to make many more. In the United States we might instance the late Fr. Paul James Francis, S.A., an Anglican, then Roman, religious, who began the Octave of Unity. In England Fr. O'Brien, sometime Superior-General of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers), and others, performed yeoman service for reunion. Fr. Puller, another great Cowley Father, ably represented our religious at the Anglican-Roman negotiations of 1895-6, and also at the Malines Conversations of the early 1920s. With him were associated Bishop Gore, Founder of the Community of the Resurrection, and his confrere, Bishop Frere. With them we rightly join a name honored more recently on both sides of the Atlantic, Lord Halifax. His venerable father gave an unusually long life to the cause of reunion: he helped found Cowley and tried his vocation there; he kept the Caldey Benedictines financially afloat; and throughout he was intimately connected with religious in both Communion.

For us as for him, reunion may be a dream, a forlorn hope:

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky."

But it will come, because it is God's will. It may not come in our time or in the coming century. Yet for it we must "pray without ceasing" in the tremendous power of the supernatural virtue of hope, and strive as well by every means at our disposal.

## **B. Lay Apostolate**

Mention of a devoted, prominent layman leads to our second point: the use and mission of the laity. This may be divided into two: laymen within or closely connected with the various Orders, and those outside such directly intimate contacts who may be affected and influenced by religious. Earnestly is it to be hoped that communities for laymen, like the Brotherhood of St. Barnabas in the United States and the Brothers of St. Francis of Assisi in England—in the one case exclusively and in the other largely lay in membership—may grow steadily. Their witness and worth are of outstanding significance. For the larger number of Orders admitting both clerical and lay members, there exists the sincere wish on the part of some among us that laymen may not simply wait for the priesthood (feeling that their call to religion remains incomplete until they be ordained), but on their own part and by encouragement and direction of superiors proceed to utilize fully whatever abilities God gives them. After all, in the long sweep of monastic history from the middle of the third century until today, having the major proportion of male religious in Holy Orders is a comparatively recent innovation. St. Benedict remained a layman, St. Francis perhaps a deacon. By and large, monks were generally laics with a few bishops and priests to carry out sacramental ministrations. Nowadays one is struck over and over again by the really vast amount of spiritual and material works laymen are entirely capable of performing, works for which ordination is unnecessary.

Most modern Anglican communities have laity of both sexes associated with them under some sort of rule of life. These laity live amid secular conditions, but also, to a greater or lesser extent, achieve hidden lives of prayer and pious labor. Many of them take celibate vows. The Order of the Holy Cross, for example, sponsors five separate groups of associates: two for priests, one for seminarists, and two for men and women. Such groups need to be enlarged greatly. Through them a mass of ignorance, misinformation, and prejudice among Episcopalians regarding 'Fathers' and 'Sisters' may be broken down. The communities are able to direct the spiritual regimen of their members, and provide definite things which these good souls may do in behalf of Christ and His Church. There seems no reason why we could not take lessons from the Lay Apostolate of the Roman

Communion and even adapt certain of their procedures to parochial plans for lay ministry. Then there are suggestive activities along these lines in Greece and America among wide-awake younger Orthodox clergy and laity. It may be of interest to recall that the great German lay movement of recent times was begun by a Roman Catholic layman, Dr. Fassbender, who based his scheme on the pattern of the Salvation Army and the Lutheran Inner Mission. By the same token, Anglican churches may absorb much from such lay organizations as the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Third Order of St. Francis.

Furthermore, in dealings by 'mixed' or 'active' institutes with the public as a whole, a rough classification may be given in regard to rich and poor. For a wealthy person who has on his hands a beautiful house and grounds, it is not altogether unusual to present them to the Church or a religious community for whatever purposes may be served under such a spiritual aegis. Certainly this happens in Roman Catholic circles in this country, and in Episcopal circles likewise. Sometimes the donor is associated with the Order to which the offer comes; sometimes he is practically unknown thereto. 'White elephants' occasionally saddle a community, but not seldom these estates prove Godsend. The rich who no longer need a mansion capable of housing an Order or an Order's work of mercy or education should be encouraged to make such presentations, and where feasible to add endowments.

For the ordinary populace in our cities and small towns, the religious of the future should do everything possible to communicate the Gospel through missions, street preaching, personal contact, and other available means. Lay religious can do it; lay associates can help immensely; the individual testimony of converted Catholic living by those touched through religious, affecting indifferent churchmen and persons outside the Church, can do even more. Paul Sabatier, writing about St. Francis, remarked: "It is not easy to hear and apply to oneself the exhortations of preachers who, aloft in the pulpit, seem to be carrying out a mere formality; it is just as difficult to escape from the appeals of a layman who walks at our side." We realize that ours is a decidedly pragmatic generation, and that people are more apt to be persuaded by Christian action than Christlike living. With Goethe we are inclined to feel that "in the beginning was the Deed." True it is, of course, that Christlike living is an aspect

of the ministry for Christ, the priesthood of believers which we all—whether clergy or laity—can and should share, and to which the Emersonian maxim applies: “What you do speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you say.” Nevertheless, the Word of God must have proclamation side by side with demonstration. We cannot minimize the importance of witness by speech. Here lies a real challenge to every lay religious, his associates and friends.

### **C. Influence on Church Life**

The religious of the American Episcopal Church, in particular, should gradually exert a more direct and abiding influence over the Church. We may take inspiration from the extraordinary revival of popular Church life in France twenty years ago through the efforts of the lower clergy and religious Orders. The religious impelled the French episcopate to take the lead by official declarations concerning fundamentals of social and economic reorganization of the shattered country. They inaugurated a regular campaign of sermons. They edited, inspired, wrote, rewrote hundreds of articles in inexpensive ecclesiastical periodicals. Attempts in certain conservative circles to minimize the vigor of these pronouncements failed.

France faced utterly different and in some respects more serious postwar problems than did America. However, Episcopalians surely must recognize our need for a similar reawakening. As vocations come to our monasteries and convents and our numbers and consequent impact on the rank and file of the parishes increase, so should our presence and purposes be felt on an ever-increasing scale. Our religious ought to be awake to current political and social problems, so that in their public appearances and private dealings with souls the timeless implications involved in these difficulties may be reasserted. Thus may the overwhelming dangers of secularism, humanism, and ambition of the nation and its citizens be avoided, and these forces be rechanneled into Christian and Catholic directions.

Usually we think of such influences on Church life as available only to active or mixed communities of ordained or unordained men. Yet for those Orders of women who mingle at all with the world (and most of ours so far do this) there is a great and often overlooked amount that may be achieved. For example, the Canadian Sisters of St. John the Divine have long been leading Lenten Quiet Days for both sexes, addressing Altar Guilds, speaking to business and

professional women's clubs, talking to high school youngsters, and conducting meditations—these in the States as well as the Dominion. Some American Sisters have done likewise.

#### **D. Communities versus Individuals**

Our fourth point springs out of the frank recognition of a situation still obtaining among us, though happily not as often as in earlier days of the Anglican revival of religious life. There are individuals to be dealt with here and there who feel a vocation to be religious founders and superiors, but who frequently are called by God actually to lead a *devout*, not a *community* life. Their individualistic peculiarities—despite clear evidences of personal piety and zeal for souls (not always 'according to knowledge')—normally prevent them from doing lasting work for Jesus. Some simply cannot get along with other people and must go their own gait. Others can and should swallow their pride, tame idiosyncrasies, and 'take the lowest place' in a carefully chosen community willing with its eyes open to accept a difficult postulant. Anyone in the least conversant with the last century's story of Episcopal (and Anglican) monks and nuns reads there the sorry tale of infinitesimally small 'Orders' of one, two, or three members who rise, flaunt a remarkable habit and yet more fearful and wonderful customs before the startled gaze of Anglican and Episcopalian churchpeople—and then 'go the way of all flesh' into oblivion.

The holy Canon T. T. Carter stressed the necessity for communities, and not simply personal self-oblation. Individual devotion passes, communities remain. He saw clearly the need of corporate life, something much more than individual dedication. Wisely he clarified what we need to realize. In the history of religious life there appear to have been two different aims: one, the perfection of the individual; the other, the perfection of the community. The Canon himself seemed to aim at both. A constructive genius was his, manifesting itself in organization. On the one hand he sought to lead Sisters one by one into the ways of holiness; on the other, he recognized that permanency of results depends on the existence and careful building up of community life. When will we cease multiplying ephemeral 'Orders' and concentrate on enhancing those larger groups whose stability has been proved by the acid test of circumstances and passing years, as well by effectual labors for God and men?



### **E. Concentration of Effort**

Fifth, we may list the desirable centralization rather than overly wide distribution of monastic foundations. The latter has occurred many times in Anglican religious Orders. I believe that samples of it are discoverable on a disturbing scale in files of Church papers. It has happened in four or five cases within an equal number of recent years. We have encountered the danger of delusions of grandeur, of biting off more than we can chew, of spreading out too thin, of lengthening our cords instead of strengthening our stakes. What is the result? Schools, missions, parish responsibilities are given up—for various reasons, of course—but ‘lack of numbers’ is the usual ostensible cause. Numbers cannot always be maintained. But if there did not exist the rush to undertake works which cause both the mother house and her subsidiaries to be hopelessly understaffed, concentration, consolidation, contemplation, and solid growth would ensue.

One writing from the viewpoint of some years’ service in the Liberian hinterland may be allowed to echo Bishop Gore’s conviction when he visited India in 1930 to spend much time with the Oxford Mission to Calcutta. He emphasized that the life lived under monastic vows is required to impress and convert the Hindu people. In that splendid religious missionary organization he rejoiced to see such influences in operation. During his stay his experience and knowledge enabled him to give the brethren invaluable counsel for their future policies. He impressed upon them the need for consolidating their corporate life. In his own Community of the Resurrection he had seen the difference made by its being concentrated at Mirfield rather than having one Brother here and another there. Only too well he knew the bad effects of distraction even by good works. We may learn from such advice, applicable as much to domestic as to foreign religious houses and personalities.

At Bolahun, Liberia, especially as the Order of the Holy Cross’ mission completes nearly a half-century of its existence, we realize increasingly the dangers, inefficiency, and generally unsuccessful results of dividing our few forces. It seems to be far better for companionship’s sake, and to overcome loneliness in the midst of a largely heathen and entirely alien race, to pool efforts and ideas. These are aside entirely from higher considerations of religious community ideals and spiritual unification. As a result, one or two strong centers only were developed. While we have preached in nearly forty

towns, we centralize at the single main station and just two or three other fairly strong outstations. On a small scale this is what I believe Bishop Gore meant. This is what history, if it has any lessons along this line by which we are willing to profit, teaches us with clarity. An individual religious living apart from his or her community on 'detached service' is something of an anomaly, and can seldom prove a source of strength thereto. Too many houses for a small Order will lead to disaster; it will entail the surrender of many works altogether or their being given over reluctantly to secular hands. This is not an exaggeration, but a reality for the present and a warning for the future.

### **F. Devotion to Founder's Principles**

While each community among us clearly possesses its peculiar ethos, there is still too much estimation in 'activist' modern Anglican circles (sharing the common failing of our pragmatically-oriented civilization) of our position in the Church as valuable simply from the standpoint of 'good works'. Undeniably this was the major factor in winning the way for the return of nuns to our Communion as 'Sisters of Mercy or Charity.' How much *good* they will *do!* This remains the sole criterion by which many generous churchpeople judge us; the main reason, in their sight, for our existence; sometimes, the paltry excuse (veiled, yet present) that we are cheap parochial and mission workers. Evidence of this estimate of Anglican religious is common knowledge, and it is shared by many who are sincerely interested in our welfare. It is expressed casually, and also in print. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (an edition several years back), an article on 'England, Church of' by a supposedly competent authority devotes a single sentence to the place and activities of religious communities. The author—a man in Holy Orders, holding Master's and Doctor's degrees, who wrote at least two books on early English Church history and was for several years president of the Royal Historical Society—could certainly have given more space and a more adequate outline for the "twenty-six sisterhoods and several institutions of deaconesses, and one or two communities of celibate clergy" by whom "good work is done."<sup>1</sup> The numbers were understated—

<sup>1</sup> William Hunt, "England, Church of," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1910), Vol. IX, p. 453.

even for 1910!—and the stress is laid just on “works.” But the *life* is what matters. Works grow out of it. Works are subsidiary to the whole-souled life dedication of prayer, rule, and vows.

During the generations to come, shall not we religious of this Church every once in a while seriously reconsider our founders' or foundresses' principles, to see that we adhere ever more closely to the primary spiritual aspirations and ideals of our respective institutes set forth by them? By renewed and increasing devotion toward these foundation truths, there will be comparatively little risk of slipping from our highest hopes. Let us not give the attestation of truth to that crowding out of *life* by *works* to which we, like our critics or even admirers, are inclined. Fr. Benson of Cowley lived a life of utmost strenuousness, and he laid it upon his sons. Yet a reading of all his numerous writings and inspiring addresses and letters shows that in a 'mixed-to-active' society, the *life* was to be at the core of his mission priests' labors for God and souls. From this restorer of the religious life for men in the Anglican Church we should take heart of grace, and relight the flame of devotion to the founding father's zeal and basic principles in every one of our communities.

In a rather wide study of the subject, I have nowhere encountered this very point so adequately summed up as by the Roman Catholic Archbishop Ullathorne in the course of his autobiography. He was an exceedingly busy yet humbly devout Benedictine, and he exemplified by his life the proportions he emphasizes in the passage which I venture to quote here at length:

In studying the Religious Orders as spiritual schools, it has often recurred to me that whilst each has a characteristic temper and love of its own, and a disposition to lean upon some individual quality or virtue as distinctive of its life and work, this very tendency requires a guard against its running into some correlative defect. And for want of this guard being always vigilantly observed, Religious Orders are mostly prone to deteriorate. Thus the temper of the Benedictine Order is largeness of spirit, or freedom, apt to degenerate into laxity. That of Saint Francis is poverty, apt to degenerate into sordidness. That of Saint Dominic is rigid law and science, apt to degenerate into the stiffness of the letter and pride of intellectual culture. That of Saint Francis de Sales is spiritual sweetness, apt to degenerate into spiritual softness. That of the Carmelites is contemplation, apt to degenerate into leaving Our Lord's Life and Passion in abeyance. That of the Society of Jesus is the practical, apt to discard the contemplative spirit, and to degenerate into policy. . . . Moreover, whenever an Order turns aside from the special aim and scope of its

founder, and takes to other employments and pursuits, its spirit evaporates in proportion, and it acquires some new spirit that is not in accordance with that of its founder.<sup>2</sup>

Here is meat for meditation. Let us ponder it in the days ahead. Only as we remain steadfastly true to our originating principles will we be worthy of existing, and of bringing forth fruit from seeds and roots firmly planted by our founders. Expansion and development may and should come. That is growth; that is life itself. But the life of the vine has to be kept alive by contact with the present stem: our Rules and our bases in those fundamentals set before us in the past.

### **G. Bound by Vows to Christ**

Last, let me place as a continuing ideal for Anglican religious during the next century the upholding of the essential character of our whole vocation. This is, that we are bound by our vows—simple, solemn, life-long, or temporary (in some cases not actual vows but promises of nonetheless real and morally binding effect)—to “One, our Master, even Christ.” In this objective fact lies the heart of our offering, the reason for our acceptance of the Evangelical Counsels of Perfection: that we may, as religious, be actually, literally, ‘bound’ to Him. Whatever our activities—indeed much more if they be distracting and onerous—we must learn increasingly to live in detachment from all that is of the world, with growing forgetfulness of self and everything which pleases merely the outer man, and deepening consciousness of those vows as binding us to Christ, the central Power of the religious life.

“I wonder,” wrote Fr. Benson (who greatly influenced the founder of the Order of the Holy Cross, Fr. Huntington), “if a real wave of persecution for His sake [were] ever to travel westward so as to overspread Europe and America. If it did, how many are there who would bear it?” His words to us—so nobly and steadfastly manifested in his nine decades of selfless service to God and his brethren for whom Jesus died, rose, and lives—may well serve for incentive, for renewal of dedication, and for holiness to the utmost. For, again as Fr. Benson reminds us: “We must see that we are living for Christ in such a sense as to experience that He is worth dying for.”

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Ullathorne, *From Cabin-Boy to Archbishop: The Autobiography of Archbishop Ullathorne*. (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1941), p. 213.