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Reprinted from "Festival 1989 — 'LUX MUNDI' — A Celebration of Essays Edited and Published One Hundred Years Ago by Charles Gore".

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## Anglican Catholicism — Credible or Compromised?

The Revd Dr Jeffrey John, Dean of Divinity, Magdalen College, Oxford

Here's a text for you from the original Preface to Lux Mundi, one hundred years ago:

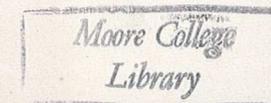
*"WE ARE SURE that if men can rid themselves of prejudices and mistakes (for which, it must be said, the Church is often as responsible as they), and if they will look afresh at what the Christian Faith really means, they will find that it is as adequate as ever to interpret life and knowledge in its several departments, and to impart not only intellectual but also moral freedom".*

Lux Mundi is now seen as a great step forward for the Catholic cause in the Church of England. It is often cited as major proof of the vitality and intellectual weight of the movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Here was a faith which could speak to the prevailing secular thought of the time and speak convincingly. Theologically, Anglo-Catholicism of this sort was a real cutting edge. In Lux Mundi's bravest essay of all, written by Charles Gore, Gore emphasized that religious tradition is not an unchanging given, but an organic growth in the light of the spirit. It is *semper eadem* because the God who reveals himself is always the same; but it is also *semper renovata*, because in order to live at all it has to adapt to the new insights of every age. It was this understanding which enabled Gore in that particular essay to face up to the challenges of the new biblical criticism coming out of Germany, which had exposed the truth that Scripture itself is the product of a constantly changing, constantly rewritten tradition. Gore argued very persuasively that far from weakening a truly Catholic faith, this understanding of the changing, adaptive nature of tradition would actually strengthen and enrich it.

Today, Anglican Catholics of all sorts seem to be glad to claim Gore and Illingworth and the rest of them as representatives of a heyday, heroes of the faith, bringers of intellectual respectability and relevance. How things are changed, we sigh. Where are the giants who can interpret the faith for us now?

People have forgotten that in their own time the authors of Lux Mundi were bitterly criticized for what they wrote, and by their fellow Anglo-Catholics most of all. On the more respectable side Henry Liddon wept for their betrayal of the faith of Pusey

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and the fathers, and trembled in apprehension as to where this questioning of the Bible's literal truth might lead. On the less respectable side, the Anglo-Papalists, the Church Times and the other organs of "Advanced" Anglo-Catholicism variously damned Gore for a traitor, a modernist, a Protestant and a liberal, who had sold the Catholic pass and abandoned the True Faith.

The truth was that Gore was fighting on two fronts. In the first place he, like the whole Catholic movement, wanted to combat the latitudinarian worldliness, the non-committal blandness of the caricature Church of England, which then as now was all too much a reality. He wanted to fill the shallowness of C of E Protestantism with a rich and real Catholic spirituality, with strong sacramental teaching, and a grasp of order and tradition, and, no less than the Evangelicals, an urgent sense of mission and challenge. These things gave him common cause with all the Anglo-Catholics, and made him, despite his detractors, a true Catholic, and a great Catholic.

But Gore was also a rational man in the fullest sense, one who revered the specifically religious authority of reason as man's indwelling Logos; and to such a man any sort of fundamentalism or obscurantism, Protestant or Catholic, Biblical or Roman, was bound to be anathema. And it was that respect for reason and truth, and for the co-inherence of each kind of truth, that set Gore so strongly against fundamentalist Anglo-Catholicism, and particularly Anglo-Papalism, as the enemy within. However admirable individual Papalists might be as pastors, and however much one might legitimately borrow from Roman liturgy and Roman spirituality, Gore saw very clearly that the ideological incoherence of the Anglo-Papalist position, with Anglican priests schizophrenically giving allegiance to an authority which denies the Anglican priesthood itself, — that undermined more than anything else the integrity and credibility of the whole Catholic enterprise in the Church of England.

Today, it seems to me, any intelligent Anglican Catholicism is going to be faced with the same war on two fronts. Our fundamental duty has never changed: to preach teach and live by the fullness of the Christian faith, and to offer it anew to every generation. No-one can argue that Catholic faith and spirituality have yet overtaken the Church of England. It is true that bits of it have filtered down. Vestments and Reservation and frequent Communion are normal enough; and pretty well anything else that the Anglo-Catholic Fathers fought for will now be tolerated as one option in the Anglican mix. But we can hardly claim that the British Church and people have been Catholicized in any deep or lasting sense. And while in more recent years it may

be true that the latitudinarian soft centre is disappearing from the Church of England, it is equally true that it's not an Anglican Catholicism which is filling the gap, but a very rapid growth of Evangelical commitment and Evangelical spirituality.

But for the would-be rational Catholic today, there is still the battle to be fought on the inside, with the same sort of fundamentalist Anglican Catholicism which damned Gore. Anglo-Papalism is still there in various guises, as schizoid and debilitating as it ever was; and the movement as a whole is if anything even more marked by a static view of tradition and a knee-jerk hostility to anything you might call theological inquiry. At least in 1889 Gore had no difficulty finding theologically respectable Catholic collaborators. But look around the Catholic Societies, the Catholic Shrines, the Catholic

Theological Colleges today. How many enthusiasts would you find there for that agenda in the Preface of *Lux Mundi*? *"To explode prejudices? To accept that the Church makes mistakes? To reexamine and reinterpret afresh the Christian faith in the light of new knowledge? To accept that Christian doctrine must develop and adapt to contemporary insights and circumstances? To uphold and pursue intellectual and moral freedom?"* What connection is there between those aims and what is perceived as Anglo-Catholicism today? Most Anglo-Catholics now *define themselves* as the ones who want to STOP all those things!

Here I can't help getting into the two awful issues on which the whole thing now seems to be terminally foundering: the ordination of women, of course; and less obviously, but I'm afraid I think more fundamentally, homosexuality. The resolution of both issues is crucial to Anglican Catholicism, and at the moment, tragically, they are the two issues where the Catholic movement seems to be stuck in its most compromised and least credible pose.

I know it's tedious, but I'll have to rehearse yet again the two main lines of argument used by Catholics against the ordination of women.

One is the so-called eikonic argument, which says that the priest has to be male in order to symbolize Christ, and that Christ had to be male, because maleness is in some sense inherent in God — i.e. the male imagery isn't just accidental. This view ties in with the biblical teaching that the natural headship of the male in creation and in marriage reflects, the headship of Christ over the Church; and it is argued that this again is not merely a culturally-conditioned metaphor, but an absolute truth about

God and his will for the world. Now there are lots of problems with the eikonic theory; but the biggest is that if you follow it through logically and consistently it will inevitably lead you to the point of denying that women are *truly* made in the image of God at all; a conclusion which was indeed reached both by St Paul (in certain moods) and by St Albert the Great, but in general the Church as a whole has been reluctant to draw it. On the contrary, the Church *does* acknowledge that in baptism men and women *equally* are identified with Christ and renewed in his image. Contrary to an opinion beloved of Catholic clergy, it is *baptism*, not ordination, which makes *each* of us an *alter Christus*. By baptism both men and women *already* share in Christ's own priesthood, by being incorporated in the Royal Priesthood of the Church. The ordained priesthood is not separate from that royal priesthood which belongs to all Christians: ordination is no more than a special focussing in one individual of that Royal Priesthood of Christ which he shares with us all, and femaleness should logically be no more a bar to it than it is to baptism.

If, on the other hand, you revert to the source of the male imagery and try to argue from the Bible, the appeal to St Paul's teaching on male headship is liable to lead you into even more problematic inconsistencies. Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 (and pseudo-Paul in 1 Timothy 2) insists that his theological premises about the place of women are inseparable from his practical conclusions; the whole argument, based on the creation and sin of Eve in Genesis, is structured so that one simply cannot say that parts of it are "culturally conditioned" and parts of it are not. If you really believe Paul's doctrine of headship is valid for all time, then by his command you'll have to forbid women not only to be ordained but to speak in church at all, or to cut their hair, or to hold any authority over men — and you'd better get them back into mantillas.

Because the biblical and eikonic arguments are so hard to maintain without either being inconsistent or else being *really* nasty to women, most theologically minded Catholics have in fact abandoned them, and prefer to use the ecumenical argument. This is a much stronger and specifically Catholic argument, which says that the Anglican Church cannot unilaterally ordain women without abandoning its claim to preserve Catholic order. On this understanding it would be O.K. for Anglicans to ordain women provided the Pope and the Orthodox agreed to ordain them as well; but we can't do it on our own and yet still claim that our Bishops priests and deacons are the same as theirs are.

Now this is a view which convinced me for some time, but there are further considerations which have unconvinced me. The first is simply the point that to ordain women is not the same as abandoning the threefold ministry or even

interrupting apostolic succession, but simply deciding to admit a different sort of person into it, and that's a very different thing. In other words, ordaining women seems to me to be a second-order, not a first-order issue, and anyway in the case of deacons we've already *done* it unilaterally with very little anguish. Furthermore the Romans and Orthodox *do not recognize our orders now anyway*, and even if we didn't ordain women it might be a long time before they did. And although it is painful to think that this decision may postpone recognition and reunion still further, and although we have to take the Pope's warnings on the subject very seriously, nevertheless, we should take our Anglicanism seriously too. We are separated now on conscientious grounds, and we choose to become or remain Anglicans precisely because there are already certain freedoms and matters of principle which we refuse to negotiate. Much as we may long for reunion and intercommunion — and I do — they can't be pursued at *any* cost. Points of principle must override points of ecumenical pragmatism; otherwise, why be an Anglican at all? If we decide it is right in itself to ordain women priests, and that that is not in fact inconsistent with Catholic faith or order, then we have a positive moral duty to get on with it, and pray that the rest of Christendom will come round to it — just as they eventually got round to a number of other things which Anglicans got right first.

The second awful issue, which for obvious reasons also has strong implications for the first, is homosexuality. Everybody knows, especially after the recent combined efforts of Tony Higon and Rupert Murdoch's newspapers, that the Anglican church has a particular problem with homosexuality, and especially with homosexual clergy; and it's an open secret that the problem is pretty heavily concentrated at the Catholic end of the Church. All the signs are that it's never been any different: even from the time of Newman, Froude and Faber on, there's been a very strong homosexual element conditioning Anglo-Catholicism, especially in the priesthood, and this affects the self-perception and self-confidence of the movement more than we usually care to acknowledge. Of course there are all sorts of cynical reasons one might give for this being the case: the cloak of celibacy; the dubious attractions of dressing up; the aesthetics of ritual and so on. More positively, and in my view more importantly, Catholic Christianity is simply better at embracing human beings as they are and dealing with them constructively; and in this respect sacramental confession too has clearly played an important and positive role in helping and managing homosexual problems, and not least the confessional in this Church.

But now the situation is different. Ever since the sixties homosexuals have been

discovering self-respect, and refusing to be dealt with simply as sinners. However hard the Synod tries to appease Mr Higton and the AIDS backlash, you can't get away any more with telling a gay person that his or her gayness is to be met with repentance and a call to celibacy. This is unjust and damaging not only to gay people but also to genuine celibates — since after all celibacy is supposed to be a positive call of God, not a bolt-hole in which to hide from the truth about oneself. Furthermore it is morally as well as practically irresponsible, especially in the face of AIDS, to imply that all homosexual practice is equally sinful, as though a lifetime's faithful and loving partnership can be lumped together with a series of one-night stands and indiscriminately labelled SIN.

What has in fact been happening for some time among ethically serious gay Christians and their counsellors, in the confessional or elsewhere, is that essentially the same moral criteria are being applied as to heterosexuals. The morality of sexual activity is judged according to the quality and commitment of the relationship it expresses; which means that the proper ideal for a Christian, gay or straight, who is not called to genuine and positive celibacy, is permanent and exclusive monogamy. Over the last twenty years the most important Church studies of the issue have concluded that the moral and indeed sacramental status of a permanent, faithful same-sex relationship is comparable to that of a heterosexual married couple who happen to be incapable of childbirth. There is nothing particularly "liberal" about this view: it rules out homosexual promiscuity and unfaithfulness as strongly as it rules out heterosexual promiscuity and adultery, and it is based on the same theological premises of the dignity of human beings and the sacredness of sex as a bond of personal covenant.

This was the view reached by the Church of England's own study of the matter, the rapidly shelved Gloucester Report of 1979. It was also the conclusion, I gather, of another report which was commissioned secretly by the Archbishop of Canterbury after the Higton affair, but which was shredded not long ago because in the wake of recent press scandals the Bishops were too frightened to publish it. And here, of course, we have the real problem. The great majority of bishops and clergy will take a positive and supportive line in private, but they won't dare teach it in public. Bishops seem not to grasp the obvious truth that as long as a positive Christian model of relationship is denied to homosexuals, there will continue to be *more* misery, loneliness, degradation — and scandals in the tabloid press. As for patronizing excuses about "disturbing the faithful"; in my observation the truth is that the clergy are far more hung up on this issue than the poor faithful ever are. This single issue

is loaded with so much fear that the mere mention of it can turn otherwise admirable Christian leaders into abject cowards and liars; and unfortunately nowhere is that more obviously the case than in the Catholic milieu, where one might at least expect a little more wisdom born of experience. Even to a hardened cynic, it was a stomach-churning thing to see certain Bishops and clergy endorsing Mr Higton's witch hunt last year, when one knows perfectly well they take a very different line in private. As for the expulsion of LGCM by the Diocese of London — of all dioceses! "Incredible" and "Compromised" are not the words. As Baron Corvo remarked — and he had good reason to know — the self-protecting lie comes to Catholic lips with wondrous ease.

"The Spirit of truth will lead you into all truth", and "the truth will make you free". Charles Gore also quoted those words in *Lux Mundi*. It was an invitation to Catholics to come out of their ghettos and take a risk. It's an invitation to us now. And despite what his detractors said then and what their successors say now, that does *not* mean cowardly compromise with liberalism, nor does it mean capitulation to the spirit of the age. It *does* mean to grasp that intellectual and moral freedom and growth that the Spirit brings, and which is the sign of life. It means taking reason, truth and conscience seriously, and then doing the right thing in the Spirit's conviction that it is right. It means to see prejudice for what it is and let it go. It means to face new knowledge and new situations, theological, psychological, social, sexual, political — and no longer to see them as a threat but as a challenge. What is there to lose anyway? Either we change and move forward and grow, or we'll continue to decay as we are doing — and we'll deserve to.

Forgive me if I get autobiographical. It was Anglican Catholicism that brought me to Christ at the age of eighteen, that taught me all I understand of the Christian faith, and that trained me to be a priest. I have spent my ministry aggressively preaching and teaching Catholic Christianity, and I do not mean a diluted version of it, I mean the works. And I take it ill that anyone should presume or declare that because one believes women should be included in the ordained priesthood or because one faces facts about homosexuality, one must therefore forfeit the name Catholic. I still believe with all my heart that in its right mind the Catholic movement has everything to offer, and that God can still do marvellous things for us if we let him. Even now, although I'm depressed beyond measure by the present state of affairs, Anglican Catholicism is the truest expression I know of the love of God in Jesus Christ and the surest means of growing up in him, and it's where I want to be. Even now, I *can* envisage a new, healthier, confident Catholicism which isn't constantly looking over

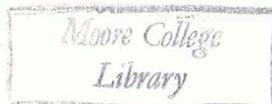
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