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The “Modern Martyrdom” of Anglo-Catholics in Victorian England

Abstract

The word “martyr” was widely applied in the later nineteenth century to a number of Anglican “ritualist” clergy who had been prosecuted for performing overtly “Catholic” liturgical practices. The focal point for such usage occurred when several individuals were imprisoned for having flouted the Public Worship Regulation Act (1874). Supporters of this legislation accused their opponents of being fakes in that their “modern martyrdom” consisted of little more than short spells in prison. However, Anglo-Catholics connected acts of contemporary defiance with those of the confessors of the early Church. A quasi-hagiographic body of discourse began to coalesce around key figures such as Arthur Tooth and Alexander MacKonochie. This process did not get far because the campaign of persecution was swiftly abandoned, however, the term “martyrdom” has subsequently become widespread in the historical discussion of these men even though none of them died for their faith. This episode highlights the way in which martyrdom can be seen in relation to milder as well as more extreme acts of religious repression and witness. But also, in so far as the cults of saints and martyrs can be seen as being substantially constructed through hagiographies and martyrologies, this episode emphasizes the discursive aspects of martyrdom in general and the role of the media in particular in the contested emergence of religious heroes.

The “Modern Martyrdom” of Anglo-Catholics in Victorian England¹

[1] In the later nineteenth century a movement developed within the Church of England which championed the Catholic rather than the Protestant heritage of Anglicanism. This aroused considerable opposition because of Britain’s long history of anti-Catholicism. In this study, I will be looking at a period of particularly sustained persecution and prosecution which centered on the passing of the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 which attempted to regulate liturgical performance. The narrative outline of the ensuing events that saw five clergy behind bars is not in doubt since it has been well explored elsewhere (in particular, see Bentley; Janes; Kitchenham and Yates). Therefore, my aim here is not to rehearse the stories of the individual clergy in question, fascinating though those are, but to think about the development of the idea of these men in particular, and Anglo-Catholic “ritualist” clergy in general, as martyrs for the cause of Catholicism within the Church of England.

[2] The use of the word “martyr” in the context of prosecuted Anglo-Catholics was widespread in the later nineteenth century and has found its way into modern texts in which we read such comments as “persecution, however, aroused sympathy and made martyrs,” and that his actions made the first such cleric to be imprisoned, Arthur Tooth, into “an instant martyr” (Drummond and Rodes: 301). It is important to make clear that such use of the word is figurative. No Anglo-Catholic faced more than a short stretch in prison, let alone execution. In the era post 9/11 we are wary of playing fast and loose with terminology. As one scholar has commented recently, a key recent concern has been to “rebuild the clear boundaries between true and false martyrs and thereby restore some sanctity to the category of ‘martyr’ itself” (Castelli: 1). It was because Victorian Britons also took the term “martyr” with great seriousness that they used it so much and expended so much energy in contesting who was or was not to be regarded as such. A key battleground was framed about the phrase “modern martyrdom,” which became widespread in the print media. It was used by opponents to suggest that the “modern martyr” was not the real thing, but a faker of suffering and a religious poseur. Many Anglo-Catholics, by contrast, understood their heroes as standing directly in the tradition of the martyrs of the early Church.

[3] “Modern martyrdom” could have developed into modern sainthood, in so far as the textual and visual apparatus of Catholic cultus was celebrated by many of the High Church wing of Anglicanism. After all, as has been argued for the early Church, the fame of martyrs is discursively produced by the stories told about them (Kyle: 243). The Anglo-Catholic faithful was prepared for such an enterprise by the medievalist Tractarian tradition of the

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the Anglo-Catholic History Society in London in October 2010. I want to thank those present for their valuable suggestions toward the revision of this work.

reception of the lives of the Fathers. Moreover, their enthusiasm should also be set in the context of a widespread Victorian enthusiasm for the self-sacrificing hero; a craze which reached its most exuberant flowering as a result of the death of General Gordon in 1885 (Johnson). This study, therefore, is about the contested desire for martyrs in Victorian England and centers on the key assertion that “modern martyrdom” was a cultural construction which was substantially developed and projected through the Victorian media. Religious ideas and personalities were of major interest to newspapers and periodicals of the time and, therefore, the media should not be regarded as a textual realm that was quite separate from ecclesiastical debate and, thus, of little relevance to the writing of ecclesiastical history. Writers of nineteenth-century religious history need, therefore, carefully to distinguish between martyrdom seen from the point of view of doctrine and its re-emergence as an aspect of celebrity in the later nineteenth century. After all, the death of Christ, as projected through the Gospels, was a media event.

Definitions of “martyrdom”

[4] The Oxford English Dictionary (<http://dictionary.oed.com/>) reveals the potential range of meanings of the word “martyr.” Firstly, and most obviously, it is: “a person who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce faith in Christ or obedience to his teachings, a Christian way of life, or adherence to a law or tenet of the Church; (also) a person who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce the beliefs or tenets of a particular Christian denomination, sect, etc.” The word can also be used to refer to those who have suffered in similar ways, but in a non-Christian, or indeed a non-religious context. It might be used to refer hyperbolically to all manner of suffering, as when the prominent actress and writer Fanny (Frances Anne) Kemble (1809-93) wrote: “she is a martyr to dyspepsia and bad cooking” (Kemble: 186). The word has been employed since the fourteenth century in a variety of variously humorous or ironic ways in reference to making “a real or pretended sacrifice of one’s inclinations in order to gain credit.” This means that careful attention needs to be paid to the context of the use of the word in such pronouncements as that of George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans, 1819-1880): “Mr. Lewes makes a martyr of himself in writing all my notes and business letters. Is not that being a sublime husband?” (quoted in Cross: 159).

[5] It is important to note that the core Christian usage identified above was applied to Charles I “by those members of the Anglican Church who regarded his execution in 1649 as an act of religious persecution; cf. *martyr-king*.” This meant that there was a distinct High Church tradition of employing the word martyr to someone who had fallen foul of Parliament. This usage was, in a slightly ironic form, employed by Members of Parliament themselves. For instance, in 1880, during one of the many debates on the issue of whether

the atheist Charles Bradlaugh (1833-91) should be allowed to take his seat in Parliament without being required to swear the religious oath of allegiance, Henry Richard MP (1812-1888) said of those opposing any such move that:

I have the strongest conviction that they are doing far more damage than service to the cause which, I have no doubt, is near to the hearts of many of them. For what are they doing? They are advertising Mr. Bradlaugh and his doctrines over the country and over the world. They have raised him to a pinnacle if not of popularity, at least of notoriety, which makes him the observed of all observers. They are enabling him to pose, if such be his ambition, as a hero and a martyr before his own followers (*Hansard* 1880).

[6] This is, of course, an extended, metaphorical use of the term. There is no sense that Bradlaugh faced any danger of death or, indeed, significant hardship. The word “martyr,” as employed here, means someone who is viewed by certain people as having suffered at the hands of the law unjustly. To take another example, Sir Alexander Beresford Hope MP (1820-87) commented in 1877 on a proposed Bill to recognize in the United Kingdom (where it was currently illegal and highly controversial) marriage to a deceased wife’s sister when it had been carried out in Australia (where it was legal). Imagine, he says,

a couple who have been married according to law in the Colony, and under the protection of my right hon. Friend’s bill. Well, they attempt to go into society [in the UK], and what is their position there? No doubt, in some quarters they would be received with all the honours of martyrs; elsewhere, they would be regarded as persons who, for the purpose of contracting a marriage which is not legal in this country, had evaded the law of the mother country by undertaking the expense and trouble of a long voyage (*Hansard* 1877).

The term “martyr” was thus adaptable to both proponents and opponents of Anglican ritualism, and had a specific English reference to Parliamentary injustice.

The Public Worship Regulation Act (1874).

[7] The use of the word martyr was first applied to Anglo-Catholics who were imprisoned in the wake of the most sustained legislative attempt to halt High Church innovation: the “Act for the better administration of the Laws respecting the regulation of Public Worship,” better known as the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 (hereafter PWRA). This misguided piece of legislation was introduced by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald Campbell Tait (1811-82), as a private member’s bill and it came into force on July 1, 1875.

Initially, it was widely feted as a sensible measure aimed at ensuring a clear separation between Protestantism and (Roman)Catholicism, as can be seen from the cartoon “Black Sheep” (*Punch* 1874: 217). This shows Archbishop Tait with a crook which reads “PUBLIC WORSHIP REGULATION BILL,” black sheep that he is separating from the herd which have “RITUALISM” written on their backs, and a signpost in the distance reading “TO ROME.” It is interesting to compare this cartoon with the Pre-Raphaelite (and evangelical) painter William Holman Hunt’s *Our English Coasts, “Strayed Sheep”* - N05665, Tate Gallery, London (1852), in which the peace of a flock of sheep grazing in the English sunlight was also intended to evoke anxieties about invasions from abroad (it is the south coast), falls into sin (they are on a cliff), and enemies within (black sheep).

[8] Tait’s role in promoting and, at least, initially, in enforcing the PWRA has made him something of a hate figure in certain Anglo-Catholic circles. In the perspective of his overall career, Tait can be seen to have regarded himself as a believer in the strong defense of the Church of England as the Church of the Nation through a program of modernization, which involved both evangelization of the poor and legislative reform. Unfortunately for the ritualists, Tait concluded in the early 1870s that advanced Anglo-Catholics were obstructing, rather than advancing, this project. His original intention was not, however, to judicially subject the Church entirely to the State, as his opponents alleged. It was Lord Shaftesbury who led a successful amendment to give a Lay Court the final jurisdiction over ecclesiastical disputes pursued under the Act. In this, Shaftesbury was building on precedent. The Judicial Committee Act 1833 had placed the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as the ultimate court of appeal for Church law suits. That step had been denounced on a regular basis as an act of abusive Erastianism (the doctrine that the State should set and enforce ecclesiastical law). The PWRA, however, was for many ritualists, the last straw. It empowered any archdeacon, church warden or three adult male parishioners of a parish to serve on their bishop a representation:

That in such church any alteration in or addition to the fabric, ornaments, or furniture thereof has been made without lawful authority, or that any decoration forbidden by law has been introduced into such church; or,

That the incumbent has within the preceding twelve months used or permitted to be used in such church or burial ground any unlawful ornament of the minister of the church, or neglected to use any prescribed ornament or vesture; or,

That the incumbent has within the preceding twelve months failed to observe, or cause to be observed, the directions contained in the *Book of Common Prayer* relating to the performance, in such church or burial ground, of the services, rites and ceremonies ordered by the said book, or has made or has permitted to be made

any unlawful addition to, alteration of, omission from such services, rites and ceremonies (Brooke and Handcock: 396-8).

The bishop might stay proceedings, or could act as judge with no right of appeal. However, if either party did not agree the matter would be sent for trial.

[9] The court created by the PWRA was presided over by James Plaisted Wilde, 1st Baron Penzance (1816-1899). However, “a mere declaration of churchmanship was substituted for the required oath [of his allegiance] and subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles required by the 127th canon of 1603–4. This layman’s jurisdiction lacked moral authority, his monitions could be and were often disregarded, and his Erastianism was treated with contempt” (Rigg). A series of ruinously expensive legal cases were brought, mostly with the backing of the evangelical Church Association, and which were repeatedly opposed by the Anglo-Catholic English Church Union. Five clergymen were summoned for trial, but refused to attend as to do so would have signaled that they accepted the jurisdiction of the Court. They were, therefore, duly imprisoned for contempt of court. These men were Arthur Tooth (Vicar of St James’, Hatcham) who was imprisoned in 1877; Sidney Faithorn Green (Rector of St John’s, Miles Platting), T. Pelham Dale (Rector of St Vedast, London) and Richard William Enraght (Rector of Holy Trinity, Bordesley), who were all imprisoned 1880 and James Bell Cox (Vicar of St Margaret’s, Liverpool), who was imprisoned in 1887.

Arthur Tooth

[10] The widespread use of the term “martyr” in connection with prosecuted Anglo-Catholics appears to have originated with the prosecution of the first of these men, Arthur Tooth (1839–1931) (Whisenant: 282-3 and Palmer 2004). His father was wealthy and he was an excellent horseman and hunter. He travelled widely, including to Australia, where he appears to have discovered his vocation. He was ordained in 1863, and was appointed to his first entirely independent cure as vicar of St James’s, Hatcham, in south-east London in 1868. The parish became notorious for Anglo-Catholic exuberance and he was duly summonsed in 1876 under the PWRA for using proscribed liturgical practices. On January 22, 1877, as a result of his ignoring the decisions of Lord Penzance’s court, he was arrested and taken to London’s Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

[11] The thought that the PWRA might create martyrs was voiced as early as January 8th of that year in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (97-8), at which point, however, the danger of this happening was dismissed as not being significant. The crucial event, however, in terms of media coverage, took place at a meeting of ritualists in Bristol on January 23rd when Earl Nelson was shouted at as he argued against disestablishment of the Church of England. He

opposed the PWRA but he did not think that the appropriate solution was a legal split between Church and State. He appears to have been drowned out by extremist voices, and there were cheers for the “martyr Tooth” (*Birmingham Daily Post* 8). This “sound-bite” was reported widely, and mostly sarcastically it has to be said, in the papers, and appears to have been the occasion when the word martyr was first widely applied in the press to Anglo-Catholic ritualists. Thus, on January 27th it was noted that “there is a great deal afloat in the papers about the ‘martyr tooth’, and to us it is very new-fangled” (*Preston Guardian* unpaginated).

[12] Meanwhile, it was reported with disgust that “prayers are actually asked of the people, and offered up in several churches” (*Sunday at Home* 207). The range of negative church and chapel opinion can be illustrated by comments from Primitive Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic publications: respectively, denunciation from the (Methodist) *Christian Ambassador* (301) of “the ritualistic leprosy... the fanatical Mr. Tooth has at length fairly stepped into the line of apostolical succession in item of ‘imprisonment’, and in addition to that his friends have solemnly proclaimed him to be a martyr for the truth!”; a statement which can be compared with the measured comments of the Anglican *The Churchman’s Shilling Magazine* (105), which said that Tooth was not a martyr but merely a “self-willed albeit doubtless a conscientious man,” and with the sententious comments of *The Catholic World* (139) which argued that Tooth should simply convert immediately and have done with it. Others simply dismissed the matter as a fringe battle between religious extremists, as when Sir Wilfred Lawson (1829-1906), MP for Carlisle, addressed the liberal electors of West Cumberland at Workington and was reported in *The Times* (b: 6) as referring to the “martyr Mr Tooth whom he regarded as little more than a lunatic (laughter)”.

[13] Some of the media coverage was sympathetic. The tone of the *Liverpool Mercury* (unpaginated) is solicitous when it informs its readers in detail about Tooth’s prison conditions. It was noted that he was not put in the cell of a “first class misdemeanant” but in the “common part” of the prison, since he was to be treated as a debtor not a criminal. It was asserted that if he had a servant that person could cook and clean for him, although, of course, not live there too. It was reported that he was soon moved to a better cell which was furnished with a table and chairs and a “comfortable feather bed”. Such arrangements, which might appear to be the deserved amelioration of conditions for a gentleman unjustly imprisoned, were not viewed in at all the same light by supporters of the PWRA. For instance, *The Dundee Courier and Argus* (unpaginated) opined that:

the officials have been desirous to make things as comfortable as possible for the modern martyr... If Mr Tooth’s incarceration is a martyrdom, it is so in quite a different degree from that of men and women who were thrown into loathsome dungeons, and received deliverance from them only to be led to torture and the

stake. It is rather an abuse of language, and anything but complimentary to the memory of the real martyrs, to describe as martyrdom the exceedingly mild imprisonment which Mr Tooth has elected to undergo.

[14] Tooth's questioning of the location of his imprisonment was described in *The Times* (a: 9) as a "delicate discrimination by a modern martyr between the air of the Kent and Surrey Gaols, and it may remind us that modern manners have softened in some respects the severity of persecutions". Likewise, *The Rock's* opinion was that, "a well-dressed, well-fed ecclesiastic, holding levées and receiving bouquets of flowers from his lady admirers, and hampers of game from his male friends, is felt to have as little claim to be dubbed *Martyr* as summer excursionists in first-class carriages to Lourdes have to rank as pilgrims" (quoted in Palmer 1993: 134). Likewise *The Quarterly Review* (223) opined that "Mr. Tooth enjoyed a little martyrdom before resigning" his cure and being set free. So depending on who you asked, Tooth was either suffering the agonies of cruel imprisonment, or embarking on a life of decadent public spectacle. On February 10th the society cartoonist "Spy" [Leslie Ward] presented Tooth as a dandified "modern martyr" behind bars in *Vanity Fair* and a wax model of him was put up in Madame Tussaud's (Palmer 1993: 138). There was an element of caricature in these depictions, "a slight exaggeration of peculiarities" in the words of *The Morning Post* (5), but these images were not so much demonizing as glamorizing: Tooth had become a celebrity.

[15] This popular figuration of "modern martyrdom" as an act of deviant style of media interest may imply something interesting about the reasons why the Prime Minister, Disraeli, threw his weight behind the PWRA in 1874 despite not having any reputation for religious enthusiasm. During the crucial debates he was careful to distinguish what he presented as fake Anglo-Catholicism from true Roman-Catholicism:

so long as those doctrines are held by Roman Catholics, I am prepared to treat them with reverence; but what I object to is, that they should be held by ministers of our Church who, when they enter the Church, enter it at the same time with a solemn contract with the nation, that they will oppose those doctrines and utterly resist them. What I do object to is Mass in masquerade. To the solemn ceremonies of our Roman Catholic friends, I am prepared to extend that reverence which my mind and conscience always give to religious ceremonies sincerely believed in; but the false position in which we have been placed by, I believe, a small, but a powerful and well-organized body of those who call themselves English clergymen, in copying those ceremonies, is one which the country thinks intolerable, and of which we ought to rid ourselves (*Hansard* 1874).

With these words he elected to join with manly Englishmen in putting down effeminate posing and faking. But there is good reason to think that he was doing so in order to distract attention from doubts about his own probity.

[16] On November 25, 1864, Disraeli delivered a famous speech at the Oxford Diocesan Conference on the subject of evolution in which he said, “the question is, is Man an Ape or an Angel? (A Laugh.) Now, I am on the side of the Angels. (Cheers.)” John Tenniel’s response, in *Punch*, showed Disraeli posing as woman “dressing for an Oxford bal masqué” (*Punch* 1864) The cartoon not only carried implications of gender performance that lay somewhere between a man and a woman, but also implied, via the hooked nose, an anti-Semitic construction of an ambiguous racial status somewhere between apes and angels. By denouncing “mass in masquerade” Disraeli was attempting to deflect the attentions of those apt to discover and denounce effeminate dilettante self-regard and un-Englishness away from himself. The whole experience had a devastating effect on Tooth’s health and he was only nominally in charge of St James’s until November 1878. Although he lived on for over fifty years, he was never again given charge of a parish. Nor did he seek further fame, thus implying that it was his passing celebrity, more than his imprisonment, that was the source of his greatest suffering. If so, his martyrdom was at the hands the media.

[17] The contemporary “martyr” as a worldly figure of fun appears to have originated in the ridicule heaped earlier in the century on non-conformists who defied the law compelling them to pay (Anglican) Church Rates. For example, Tittlebat Titmouse, the villain of Samuel Warren’s (1807-77) popular novel, *Ten Thousand A-Year* (1839) elects to become a modern martyr as a part of his dastardly social rise (Steig: 155). His livelihood as a draper booms as a result of his attracting the custom of

those who shared his opinion. In a twinkling he shot up, as it were into the air like a rocket, and became popular beyond his most sanguine expectations. The name of the first Church-rate martyr went the round of every paper in the United Kingdom; and at length a lithographed likeness of him came out, with his precious autograph appended so –

‘THOMAS TAG- RAG, CHURCH RATE MARTYR.’

Subscriptions were entered into on his behalf; and as they were paid into his hands from time to time, he kept quietly increasing his purchases of linen drapery and enlarging his business, in a most decisive and satisfactory manner. Nothing could exceed the accounts brought into him of the extent to which his custom was increasing; for in each window of his shop hung a copy of his portrait attracting the eye of every passenger (Warren: 187).

[18] Media coverage is here understood to be a key aspect of contemporary “martyrdom” as a form of self-promotion. As the *Edinburgh Review* (330) commented “these days Church

rate martyrdom is now a cheap and easy path to notoriety and the martyr not only draws crowds to his shop but is usually elected an alderman of the borough and corporation. Jobs and dinners are the tortures to which he is condemned. Mr. Mellor who was himself the counsel for one of modern martyrs gives the following account of his client to the Committee of the House of Commons:

People visited him in great numbers in prison and he held levée there constantly. The late Vice Chancellor Wigram was counsel on the other side in the Court of Chancery and told that in consequence of the persecution as it was called a vast number of people resorted to his shop and that his trade was very much better in consequence of his being a martyr. I called upon him in gaol with a view of advising him to succumb and begging him for the sake of his family to give way and endeavouring to reason him out of the scruples which afflicted his mind. I was unsuccessful. On mentioning this I was told that there was no wonder about it for he was prospering very much by reason of the sympathy his case excited."

So non-conformists were accused of acts of legal defiance in pursuit of celebrity and, at the same time, such acts became so notorious that, as with "modern martyrdom" in the 1870s, "Church Rate martyrdom" became proverbial ("has almost passed into a proverb," Stanley: 20). However, a key difference is that the Anglo-Catholics were typically from a higher social class, and had no clear business interest in acting as they did. It was perhaps for this reason that their celebrity appeal was flavored more with the perverse than with the mercenary.

[19] The ruckus over Father Tooth was only the start of a period of intense personal and media interest. In many ways the year 1880 was the crisis year since it saw three clergy behind bars. These events led to a blizzard of denunciations, fulminations and publications in which the imprisoned were compared to the martyrs of the early Church and the Reformation. A good example of this hyperbole was the following "huge broad sheet" which was set up on a wall close to Lambeth Palace and which, it is reported, greatly annoyed Archbishop Tait.

THE VICTORIAN PERSECUTION, HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

B.C.

533 Three Jews cast into a Fiery Furnace for conscience' sake.

583 Daniel cast into the Den of Lions for conscience' sake.

A.D.

28 S. John the Baptist cast into prison for conscience' sake.

32 Our Blessed Lord Crucified to vindicate "the Law."

51 SS. Peter and John cast into prison for preaching Christ.

55 S. Stephen stoned to death for conscience' sake.

68 SS. Peter and Paul put to death for conscience' sake.

1555 Hooper, Ridley and Latimer burned for conscience' sake.

1556 Cranmer burnt for conscience' sake.

1877 Arthur Tooth imprisoned for conscience' sake.

1880 T. Pelham Dale, R.W. Enraght, for conscience' sake.

They are in Gaol now, in this year 1880 of Our Lord, and 43rd of Victoria, and, by God's Grace, may they light such a candle as shall never be put out (Davidson and Benham: 422).

[20] A variety of clerics published in defense of the imprisoned. T. W. Belcher, vicar of St. Faith's, Stoke Newington, argued for the similarity between the ritualists and early Christian martyrs: "the Acts of the Apostles prove the same thing of the Disciples of SS. Peter and Paul – history tells us that in almost every case these martyrs could have saved their lives; need not have remained in prison, need not have been persecuted, if only they would obey the law, and not commit contempt of court" (Belcher: 10). Yet to submit would be to involve renouncing their beliefs for the sake of a secular legalism which, in its English incarnation, had seen both Protestants and Catholics burning at the Reformation, and boys hanged for stealing apples. Belcher referred with contempt to "modern pagan Erastianism" (Belcher: 24). Similarly, Charles Boddington, rector of St. James, Wednesbury, who was also summonsed under the PWRA, expatiated on the theme that "the Church of England asserts that her Clergy are not appointed by men but by God" (Boddington: 6). The ritualists, like Daniel, had broken the law of the State and were thrown in the lion's den. Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82) wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times* in which he said that, "they have not been struggling for themselves but for their people. The Ritualists do not ask to interfere with devotion of others ...only to be allowed, in their worship of God, to use a Ritual which a few years ago no one disputed" (Pusey 8). The persecution of English priests over these issues captured international attention. On December 19, 1880 Ferdinand Cartwright Ewer (1826-1883), one of the founders of American Episcopalian ritualism, preached a sermon in St. Ignatius' Church, New York, on "The Imprisonment of English Priests for Conscience Sake" in which he robustly sought to refute arguments arising from the Union of Church and State, concerning the alleged "frivolity of ritual," and "the argument from, or rather the sneer as to 'fictitious martyrdom'" (Ewer).

Alexander Mackonochie

[21] If Arthur Tooth was the first Anglo-Catholic widely hailed and denounced as a "martyr" it was above all around Alexander Heriot Mackonochie (1825-1887) that there developed the kernel of a textual cultus of sainthood and martyrdom. Unlike Tooth, he was always austere rather than worldly. He was ordained in 1849, and held a number of curacies, notably at St George-in-the-East, London, from 1858. His time there saw a series of

particularly extreme anti-ritualist riots. On January 3rd, 1862 he became perpetual curate at St. Alban the Martyr, Holborn, London. His modern reception has become so strongly associated with martyrdom that Michael Reynolds entitled his biography *Martyr of Ritualism* (1965). The Society of the Holy Cross (*Societas Sanctae Crucis* [SSC], established 1855) was a crucial focus for advanced ritual practice in the Church of England and its members bore much of the brunt of legal persecution and prosecution. Mackonochie was Master of the Society from 1863–75, 1879–81 and in 1885. Kenneth McNab (105) has written that “the romantic picture of the SSC slum-priest living, working and dying amongst the poorest of society may owe something to Anglo-Catholic hagiography, but neither is it a work of fiction”. The air of saintliness thus evoked was transformed for many Anglo-Catholics into martyrdom by the experience of Protestant persecution.

[22] Palmer in his book, *Reverend Rebels* (1993: 113), says of Mackonochie that “martyrdom is hardly too strong a word, for that is what it must have seemed like to its victim as he underwent prosecution after prosecution... And eventually he died what many regarded as a martyr’s death amid the snows of the Scottish highlands, worn out by his stressful ministry in the slums and law courts of London”. Having apparently become lost in a snowstorm, his body was reported to have been found kneeling, his head bare, as though, uncovering his head at the last, he had made peace with his Maker. His death led to the effusion of a variety of (to be frank) bad poetry involving much expatiation on the awful wilds of the location. For instance, the infamous William McGonagall was duly uninspired:

Friend of humanity, of high and low degree,
I pray ye all come listen to me;
And truly I will relate to ye,
The tragic fate of the Rev. Alexander Heriot Mackonochie (11).

Mrs. Hamilton King’s poem, “Father Mackonochie”, rose to sentiments evoking the wilder side of Victorian hymnody:

The elemental powers have raved
O’er torrent and o’er stone,
Untamed and hostile hitherto,
At last their worst is done,
A holier death has hallowed thee, -
The Cross its place has won (quoted in Towle: 331).

[23] Fascinatingly, the accounts of Mackonochie’s death and burial in Eleanor Towle’s biography of 1890 are not simply romanticized but verge on the mystical and the hagiographic. Not only was Edward Francis Russell (1844-1925), curate of St. Alban’s, Holborn quoted as saying that “though I had watched his face for twenty years... I had never

seen it as I saw it then [in death]. There was no pallor nor any trace of pain, but only such majesty as I had never known before" (quoted in Towle: 170). But also, as the coffin was borne away across the loch, Towle tells us that:

There was no sound of life about except from one great white sea-bird which rose up and flapped its wings, and led the way before the boats... By the time they reached the pier head the coffin which they had veiled in purple was veiled in white. It was like an absolution from the hand of God. The suddenly as the ship took them on board there came a change in the sky. The snow stopped falling, the clouds and mist rolled away, the sun shone out and all at once the mountains... now stood revealed, clothed in virgin white from head to foot (Towle: 170).

[24] Behind such accounts there can be felt a palpable sense of longing for Anglo-Catholicism to have its own canon of modern saints and martyrs. Charles Lee in his 1931 biography of Arthur Tooth was quite representative of these desires when he wrote of the recently deceased cleric as "saintly" (Lee: 5). In his preface to this book F. G. Croom assured us that "Father Tooth was prepared, if need be, to die for the practice of the Catholic faith" (Lee: 3). Similarly, Joyce Coombs, in her biography of 1969, said that Tooth "had the personality and convictions to cope with martyrdom, and he could have held on [to his parish] as Mackonochie had done, though he might have died under the strain" (Coombs: 245). That notwithstanding, Tooth is honored with a full-length effigy and chantry chapel at the Anglo-Catholic pilgrimage centre of Walsingham in northern Norfolk. It is clear that the Anglo-Catholics of the later nineteenth century differed from their non-conformist predecessors in seizing the mocking imagery of modern martyrdom and transforming it into what look very like the foundations of a cult of sainthood. These processes have had a long-lasting influence on historical writing about the rise of Anglo-Catholicism which has often been undertaken from a sectarian point of view. This has even extended to retrospective re-writing of the earliest days of the movement, as when Francis Cornish wrote of the pioneering ritualist William Bennett "that he may have been a martyr, but he was a very troublesome martyr" (Cornish: 11). Bennett had indeed been forced to resign after some of the first anti-ritualism riots in 1850, but no one at that date used the word "martyr" in connection with his case (Janes: 54-72).

[25] If the discursive lives of the Anglo-Catholic martyrs were never fully elaborated it was largely because the persecutions and prosecutions quickly ran out of steam. As the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* commented of the PWRA, "this attempt at suppressing Ritualism so discredited the Act (in fact it created Anglo-Catholic martyrs) that it led to its being regarded as virtually obsolete" (Cross and Livingstone). By the end of 1880, Tait's will to fight appears to have crumpled and in the last months of this life he seems to have thought that whatever was desired by the majority of parishioners should mostly be allowed to stand (Bentley: 113). A Royal Commission was set up in 1881 and reported in 1883, after

which the PWRA ceased to be energetically enforced. The legitimacy of diverse forms of worship was recognized by another Royal Commission in 1906. Such legal changes notwithstanding, it had been the intensity of media attention that had been crucial in creating the preconditions out of which cults might have emerged. The celebrity of leading Anglo-Catholics had been building for decades – witness the advertisements in the *Church Times* in the 1860s which offered “the equivalent of American baseball cards” in the form of “carte de visite” portraits of leading “ritualist all-stars” (Reed: 215). The Victorian print media was heavily involved in elaborating, as well as simply conveying, notions of sacred heroism, just as our more diverse media continues to be so today.

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