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# The Oxford Movement's Arguments for the Union of Church and State

# Summary

The nineteenth century Oxford Movement, formed mostly by Anglican clergymen, is known to have produced the Anglo-Catholic wing in the Church of England; nonetheless, it also had an important political dimension, ignored by scholars for a long time. One of its core political ideas was a conviction about the necessity of a certain type of union of Church and State.

I shall focus on seven of the arguments that the Oxford Movement presented for such a model, which have been reconstructed after examining its writings. The first argument shows the Movement's adherence to historical English patterns of the union of Church and State. The second presents some of the criticism of a model of separation. The third and fourth outline two important theories of the Oxford Movement: the incorporation of the Church into the State and the theological superiority of the Church over the State. The fifth is in fact a set of arguments for assessing various historical political models and events. The next argument refers to Richard Hooker's conditions for the union of Church and State, while the last reconstructs the Oxford Movement's way of thinking on relations

between morality, religion and politics, and therefore the philosophical justification of their political idea.

#### **Keywords**

Tractarianism, Oxford Movement, Church and State Relations, Newman, Keble, Pusey, Froude

# ARGUMENTYRUCHUOKSFORDZKIEGOZAZWIĄZKIEM PAŃSTWA Z KOŚCIOŁEM

#### Streszczenie

Ruch oksfordzki, utworzony w XIX wieku głównie przez anglikańskich duchownych, zaowocował nie tylko powstaniem w Kościele anglikańskim stronnictwa anglokatolickiego, ale i, czego niemal nie dostrzegają jego badacze, interesującą spuścizną w zakresie idei politycznych. W centrum namysłu politycznego członków ruchu znajdowała się refleksja nad określeniem właściwego modelu związku państwa z Kościołem, związku będącego, ich zdaniem, koniecznym.

W niniejszym artykule rekonstruuję siedem argumentów stosowanych przez ruch oksfordzki dla wykazania tej konieczności. Pierwszy odwołuje się do historycznych, angielskich wzorców związku Kościoła i państwa. Drugi zarysowuje krytykę modelu rozdziału Kościoła od państwa. Trzeci i czwarty to prezentacja teorii inkorporacji państwa do Kościoła i teologicznej supremacji Kościoła nad państwem. Argument piąty to zbiór odwołań do historycznych modeli relacji Kościół – państwo i ich ocen. Argument szósty powołuje się na przemyślenia Richarda Hookera dotyczące relacji Kościół – państwo, a siódmy rekonstruuje relacje między moralnością, religią a polityką stanowiące również uzasadnienie dla proponowanego przez ruch oksfordzki modelu.

# **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**

traktarianizm, ruch oksfordzki, relacje Kościół – państwo, Newman, Keble, Pusey, Froude

# INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Movement is usually thought to have begun in 1833 when rev. John Keble disagreed with the British reforms of 1828-1833 and

preached "National Apostasy" at Oxford University Church, St. Mary the Virgin. The Movement's leaders (Keble, John Henry Newman, Richard Hurrell Froude and later Edward Bouverie Pusey) realised that the emancipation of Catholics and Protestants (1828-1829) undermined the "special relation" of the State to the Church of England. For these Anglicans, abandoning traditional, Sacramental tests for persons holding public offices meant that Anglicanism was no longer the official religion of the State and that British political life was being secularized. According to the text of the Repeal of Test and Corporation Act (1828), it was required that public officials were in the "Faith of a Christian"; not, therefore, necessarily in the "Faith of the Church of England." Since Keble, Newman, and Froude thought that only a rightful member of the Church of England could serve the English State well, they felt the idea of political emancipation was hostile not only to the Church of England, but also to the State's well-being. For these reasons they called these reforms anti-Christian and decided to form the Oxford Movement, also called the Tractarianism [Ward 1912, p. 22; Ker 2009, pp. 22-23].

This very brief introduction to the topic of Tractarianism should show that the core political issue connected with it was the question of an adequate model of Church and State relations. Examining both the writings of the Oxford Movement's leaders and its researchers, it might be noted that two contradictory models are mentioned in different contexts: "separation" and "union." However, none of these models has to date been the direct subject of research; therefore, in my opinion, the Tractarian view on both need to be described more extensively and argued. In this paper I will directly focus upon one of these models, and indirectly on the other (due to space limitations a fuller description of the Tractarian view on the model of separation might be done in a separate paper; however, a set of negative references to it can be found in the text). My research questions are, then, the following: 1) "What arguments and justifications are there to be found to support the thesis that the Tractarians preferred the model of the union of Church and State?"; 2) "Can it be said which model of the union the Tractarians preferred?"

Firstly, I shall reconstruct and clarify research that has been so far undertaken by Oxford Movement scholars: four main arguments for the union. Secondly, I shall present arguments of my own, directly

based on Tractarian writings. Finally, I shall give an overview of the aforementioned arguments and try to give an answer about the Tractarians's preferred model.

### ARGUMENT I: CONSERVATISM

One of the contemporary Oxford Movement scholars, Peter Nockles, maintains that "in many ways Tractarianism represented a revolt of Oxford Toryism to the reforming measures which the Grey ministry brought into parliament in the early 1830s" [Nockles 1994, p. 67]. This is a very important point, as it clearly links the Movement with some sort of Conservatism. Amongst many arguments Nockles brought to justify the influence of "Oxford Toryism," he mentions Newman, Keble and Pusey's esteem for the House of Stuarts, reverence for the Royal Martyr Charles I and Archbishop Laud, and their critique of the Glorious Revolution. These Conservative sentiments point towards a certain theory of the union of Church and State because behind it, as Keble stated, there lies a longing for "the monarch representing the anointed of the Lord," the embodiment or 'living type' of the dominion of Jesus Christ [Nockles 1994, p. 72; Vaiss 1996, pp. 93-126]. Keble, like seventeenth and eighteenth century Tory and High Churchmen, emphasized the idea that God gave a special mission to monarchs; they, as well as bishops, should represent Christ and prepare the subjects for His second coming [*Plain Sermons* 1842, pp. 72, 79; Keble 1869, p. 15]. Such a monarch, with a strong religious faith and religious principles, would not be able to rule under conditions in which the Church and State were separate. In Keble's vision, a monarch, head of the State, had not only purely political duties but also religious ones. Keble's political thinking resembled, then, that of the seventeenth and eighteenth century "Conservatists" who wanted to keep the union of Church and State.

# ARGUMENT II: CRITICISM OF DISESTABLISHMENT

Nockles's another point worth noting is his presentation of the Tractarians' criticism of disestablishment. Nockles quoted Newman's critique of liberalism found in his *Apologia pro vita sua* [Newman

1902, p. 69] as well as presented the Tractarians' critique of American disestablishment.

The American church is apt (...) to exaggerate these evils [of establishment], overlooking the various advantages of such a union, both to the country and to the church, by the creation of a kind of religious atmosphere, and entirely blinding his eyes to the still greater disadvantages of his own system. The very circumstance that the churchmen of America are obliged to seek for subscriptions in England for the establishment of a library to be attached to their Theological Seminary at New York, is quite sufficient to show the inadequacy of the voluntary system [Nockles 1994, p. 89].

The main point of this critique was that a disestablished Church (all Churches in America were of that kind) depended financially not on regular State subsidies but only a "voluntary system" of support from its members, as a result of which the income was too low and too unstable to allow the proper maintenance of Church institutions and her mission (at least that is what Tractarians thought). A "voluntary system" in which the State does not financially support the Church is typical for the model of separation of Church and State. From this quotation we can see that the Tractarians expected the opposite: the State should care for at least some of Church's needs. Such care had occurred in earlier periods of the history of the Church of England: the State used to fund not only libraries at Church of England seminars (mentioned in the quotation), but also new Church of England buildings (on a large scale in the years 1800-1820s), their renovations, as well as the Church of England's priests salaries. Therefore the Tractarians wished to see a continuation of an English "subsidiary system," typical for the union of Church and State. In fact by refutation of an American "voluntary system" they presented a strong critical argument against a model of separation of Church and State. [Tracts 1834, 1, pp. 1-4].

# ARGUMENT III: THEORY OF INCORPORATION

Simon Skinner, another Oxford Movement scholar, accurately stated that the Tractarians insisted that, "the influence of the church was indispensable to the state in its government of temporal affairs" [Skinner

2004, p. 93]. His argument might be called "theory of incorporation." The basis of this theory is the idea that a Church "historically anteceded and functionally transcended the state" and therefore is superior to a State [Skinner 2004, p. 102]. In support of this, Keble criticized the popular Victorian comparison of English Church-State relations to a marriage: he said that in fact the Church is not the wife of the State-husband, for such a notion inferred the Church's submission to the State. The Church and State did not agree to enter a relationship as equal communities; instead, particular states were admitted to the Universal, Holy Church, which preserved its superiority according to the idea of a corporation, which incorporates members for their own benefit [Skinner 2004, p. 103]. The benefit here seems to be of a religious kind: a State, being admitted to the Church, started to function as an instrument of God's government. According to Keble, God's will, revealed in the Scriptures, was that, "the Church should be in a certain sense politically established" [Keble 1869, p. 20]. This implied not the supremacy of a State, but of the Church.

The scriptural fragment on which Keble particularly based the duty of the union (incorporation) of Church and State was a quotation from the Book of Isaiah:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

See, I will beckon to the nations,
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;
they will bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on their hips.
Kings will be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.
They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground;
they will lick the dust at your feet [Isaiah 49, 22-23, New International Version].

What the Oxford Movement leader tried to say was that these words, spoken by the prophet Isaiah, referred to the future Church (the text was written in the eighth century BC): these were to be instructions for kings and rulers as to how they should relate to the Christian Church. Keble thought that such an instruction was being followed by the Emperor Constantine when he embraced Christianity in the fourth century A.D., and thus began to "foster" or "nurse" the Church. All kings and rulers should do the same and become "foster

fathers" and "nursing mothers" of the "children of the Church." That means the rulers should support the Church, but not make decisions for her, just like a nurse takes care of a baby: her duties are set by the parents. In Keble's interpretation, the parents who give orders to the nurse were Christ and His Church [Keble 1848, pp. 150-154]. God did not want to establish a State separated from a Church, but a State serving her.

# ARGUMENT IV: THEORY OF THEOCRACY

Another of the arguments for the Tractarians's insistence on the "Church's indispensable influence on temporal affairs" was their "theory of theocracy." Unlike "incorporation," "theocracy" was not the term used by the Tractarians: it was coined by Skinner as a result of examining some of the Tractarians' expressions, especially Pusey's and those of another Tractarian, William George Ward. Skinner said theocracy meant governance by a sacerdotal order [Skinner 2004, p. 110]. However, Ward defined the responsibilities of the Church as, "Governing the (...) in spirituals and authoritatively teaching the State its duty in temporals" [Skinner 2004, p. 119]. The Church was to produce:

A systematic theology of "general principles" and "general rules," on whose basis "she should authoritatively declare" the ideal character of man's conduct in the world. There was no limit to the extent of the church's authority: it included "what sort of causes a barrister ought to plead, and what sort of books a bookseller ought to sell" [Ward 1844, p. 48; Skinner 2004, p. 199].

However, Ward did not present any justification of this "theocratic idea." To find one we should turn rather to Pusey. In his work *Patience and Confidence the Strength of the Church* there can be found an interesting idea: "no one could doubt the superiority of things spiritual to things temporal, or that the office of a Bishop of Christ's flock was higher than that of a temporal sovereign" [Pusey 1838, p. 29].

This means that some of the Tractarians justified the Church's supremacy not only in terms of the theory of incorporation and direct reference to the Scriptures, but also by philosophical observation of

the nature of things. Because things spiritual, which are superior to the temporal, were to be managed by the Church, and things temporal were to be managed by the State, the Church was to be superior to the State. The Church was to direct how temporal affairs should be managed, so that the good of the spiritual would be protected.<sup>1</sup>

This shows that the Tractarians, at least Pusey, Ward and Keble, were willing to maintain the union of Church and State, not with the State influencing the Church, but with the Church directing the State. They preferred not just any kind of union, but most of all the "theocratic union."

# ARGUMENT V: HISTORICAL AND TRADITION ARGUMENTS

The first of these might be called "the practical order argument." It is connected with Pusey's dictum: "The parting of the State from the Church is no light matter. To the State it is suicide" [Pusey 1850, p. 208]. Keble and Pusey must have suggested that as long as the Church has influence over the people of a nation, they do not tend to revolt; but when she loses her position and authority, there is no moral force to prevent civil unrest or even a civil war in times of social or political difficulties. The influence of the Church prevents upheavals because she teaches the right moral conduct towards governors: the duty of respect and of passive obedience [Pusey 1838, p. x, 9]. They derived such an idea from the English Civil War and the French Revolution, one of the major aspects of which was the execution of kings. For the Tractarians such executions were astonishing as they emphasized the divine duties of the kings and their position: the kings, anointed by God, were to be "nursing fathers" to the Church and to the nations. Because of their anointment, the kings must be respected and obeyed by people and resistance to them is prohibited. [Pusey 1850, p. 209]. Without adhering to the religious idea that obedience to governors is a duty imposed on people by God, it would

<sup>1</sup> However, neither Pusey nor Skinner provided an answer as to why things spiritual are superior to those that are temporal. Perhaps for Pusey it was somehow so obvious that he thought it did not need an explanation.

not be possible to maintain peace nor even the security of governors and the commonwealth [Keble 1848, pp. 114-119]. Therefore, in some way, the Church had a "political mission": she teaches moral and political attitudes which are necessary for a well-functioning State. This mission might be fulfilled only when the Church remains in union with the State.

The Tractarians also appealed to history because they saw authority in Antiquity, hereditary lessons, and historical memories [Newman 1902, p. 290]. They were convinced that there existed a historical model of proper Church and State relations; a theory that put into practice the scriptural idea of a king's protection over the Church. They found it in Christian antiquity and the medieval ages, especially in the fourth century, when Roman emperors adopted Christianity as the religion of the empire (The Nicene Creed was made an official one by emperor Theodosius I in 380). According to Pusey, that adoption was made with respect to the Apostolic mission of the Church, so that she started to enjoy the privileges guaranteed by law (for example, their own propriety, autonomous spiritual jurisdiction, exemption of priests from military service). The emperors not only tolerated the Church as a subject of public law and agreed to be her "nursing fathers," but they also passed laws which were based on the Christian doctrine (for example, laws forbidding divorce, the right to celebrate Sunday and not to work, decrees declaring the non-Nicene Creed illegal) [Pusey 1850, pp. 26-36; Ker 2009, p. 66].

Another historical reference of the Tractarians might be called the "argument of tradition," because they criticized the liberal reforms of their age on the basis that these contradicted the English tradition. They said that one of the fundamentals of the English tradition was the presence of Christianity in the public sphere: this 'presence' entailed that the nation and the governor should be obedient to God, His laws, and the rules of the Church [Keble 1833, p. 12]. According to the Oxford Movement, the British State's abandonment of the Sacramental Tests and its attempt to reform the Church in Ireland without the consent of the Church convocation resembled the nation of Israel which suddenly decided (1 Sm 8) to overthrow their long-lasting dependence on God's laws, and to establish their own governor and laws, instead of God's [Keble 1833, pp. 9-10]. Both Israelites and Englishmen had severed themselves from their

tradition of obedience to God and His laws [Keble 1833, pp. 7-8]. Although this tradition had its very expression in England in laws passed in 1661 and 1673 (*Test and Corporation Acts*), it was much older than these, apparently having its beginnings in the restoration of Christianity to English kingdoms (by Augustine and Aiden) in the sixth seventh century. Hence, according to the Oxford Movement, English tradition was built on the union of Church and State, as it was built on the nation and governor's obedience to God and the laws of the Church.

# ARGUMENT VI: HOOKER'S WRITINGS

Another Tractarian argument recalled the concept of the "Father of Anglicanism," Richard Hooker. The Oxford Movement maintained that Hooker had presented an "official" theory in some aspects of English Church and State relations. They repeated his arguments that the State whose members are mostly Christians should not be separated from the Church and that it is natural for a Christian nation that the State is united with the Church. The Tractarians declared that Hooker's concept of union meant that the king had duties towards the Church and the Church had duties towards the king. According to them it did not mean that there should be one sovereign having extensive (or unlimited) power over the Church and State at the same time [Keble 1845, p. xxxix]. The king and governor's duties of protecting the Church allowed him to interfere, to some extent, in ecclesiastical matters; for example, to sanction the decisions of a convocation, or to call judges for ecclesiastical judgments. However, since 1828 and 1832 it was made easier for non-Anglicans to sit in the British Parliament and, compared to previous decades, a relatively large number of them started to sit as legislators, so for some members of the Oxford Movement, who appealed to Hooker's idea, it meant that governors and legislators lost the right to interfere with any Church matters [Froude 1839, pp. 196-197]. Because after 1828 the "secularized" State continued to interfere, said Froude, there was a reason for considering the separation of Church and State: perhaps such a separation would be the "lesser evil" for the Church than remaining in union with the "Godless" State [Froude 1839, p. 274]. However, the separation would be very harmful to the nation, as its moral and political development would have been cut short. In fact, such a nation would degenerate into the state of a heathen society, before Christianity, and all the work already done to reach the highest moral and political standards of the well-being of the nation would have to be done again [Newman 1872, pp. 7, 22, 35]. Therefore, the union of Church and State, in which governor and legislators are members of the established Church, is much better for the nation than separation.

# ARGUMENT VII: PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS: THERELATIONOFRELIGION, MORALITY AND POLITICS

The Oxford Movement generally embraced Aristotle's theory of virtues and of politics being the means of achieving moral excellence for the whole society [Oakeley 1865, pp. 7-18]. The Tractarians found Aristotle to be in accordance with the Scriptural notion of the relation between morality and politics. Both Aristotle and the authors of the books of the Old Testament wrote against the emancipation of politics from morality; they emphasized the importance of the 'moral condition' of a governor. Aristotle expressly declared that the art of governing is most fully apprehended by those with phronesis, a sort of practical wisdom enabling one to discern good and bad and to act appropriately. Only those who are thus able to discern, whose life experience is extensive enough to predict the consequences of their actions, will govern wisely, bringing the common good to the society [Erdmann, Hough 1890, pp. 165-173]. For Aristotle, then, the basic condition of good government was some moral sense. The same importance seems to be stressed in many places of the Old Testament in the history of Israeli kings being elected (or sometimes dethroned) by God because of their moral conduct. Newman's favorite example was the story of Saul, whose authority to be the king of Israel was canceled by God when God observed his long-lasting immoral behavior, especially his willfulness [Newman 1872, pp. 156-176].

The relation between morality and politics was then founded on philosophical as well as on Scriptural grounds; the same adherences were made when the Tractarians reflected on the relations between morality and religion. They maintained, following Joseph Butler's ideas found in *The Analogy of Religion*, that revealed religion (Christianity) is a fuller expression of morality than aspects of morality which might be discovered solely by human reasoning. Butler stated that Christianity was

First, (...) a republication, and external institution, of natural and essential religion, adapted to the present circumstances of mankind, and intended to promote natural piety and virtue: and secondly, as containing an account of a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason, in consequence of which several distinct precepts are enjoined us. For though natural religion in the foundation and principal part of Christianity, it is not in any sense the whole of it [Butler 1857, p. 186].

For example, the existence of God and some duties towards Him might be discovered by way of a natural way of reasoning, but the existence of the Trinity is to be discovered only through Revelation. Christian morality, accepting the doctrine of the Trinity and duties consequent upon it, was then considered a higher standard of morality than, for example, Aristotle's ethics. This conviction was justified by reference to the Scriptures, especially by the fragment from the First Letter of John (4,1-3), which says:

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world [NIV].

The Tractarians considered the Spirit of God identical with that which is good; therefore, they could treat this fragment as describing the standard of all moral and transcendent truths [Keble 1848, p. 45]. The standard for these truths was then acknowledging the Incarnation (the doctrine clearly referred to in this fragment), and of the Trinity (the doctrine implied by this fragment, eventually expressed in the Church's authoritative interpretation) [Newman 1872, p. 35]. As a result of such considerations, Keble stated: "Whatever is contrary to these doctrines, will ultimately be found immoral, and whatever is immoral, will be found contrary to these doctrines" [Keble 1848, p. 45]. Love of God in the Trinity was then the first duty of a man; the standard of all moral truths. This duty and standard was to be discovered only

through Revelation; therefore, the ample standard of morality was eventually provided by Revelation. The relation of morality to religion was then simple: morality was rooted in revealed religion.

With morality grounded in religion (religion bolstering morality) and politics grounded in morality (morality securing politics), they understood that the safeguard of right politics was institutional, revealed religion [Froude 1839, p. 193]. Followers of Christianity, knowing the deepest moral standards, were then most suitable for holding public offices, as their love of God in the Trinity guaranteed their conduct would be right and ethical, and they would search for the common good. The Sacramental Test was then a very appropriate instrument for checking if a person holds the fundamental moral doctrines. Adhering to these should be a basic condition for exercising any public office, whether it is the office of king, of a member of parliament, or of a member of the cabinet. The Tractarians maintained that the Sacramental Test should be performed in the Church of England, not only because this particular Church was established in the British State, but also because the Church of England held other religious and moral doctrines in accordance with the Revelation (the doctrine of Sacraments, of Apostolic Succession, of Passive Obedience, of the union with the State, of adherence to Christian antiquity).<sup>2</sup> Of course, the indispensable relations of religion, morality and politics required a model of the union of Church and State for them to function in.

# CONCLUSION

They are of two kinds: either showing the patterns or advantages of the union of Church and State, or pointing to the disadvantages of separation of Church and State (and often one kind is accompanied by the other). The Tractarian view on the separation [Laski 1913, p. 108; Chapman 2007, pp. 102-107] might be discussed more extensively in another paper; however, the above discussion seems enough to draw some important conclusions.

The first kind of arguments consists of the following justifications supporting the thesis that the Tractarians preferred the union of

For a Tractarian expression of the doctrines of the Church of England, see pamphlets and treaties *in Tracts for the Times*, especially vol. 1, 2 and 3.

Church and State: historical patterns of Christian Antiquity and of the monarchy of the Stuarts (an anointed monarch with a religious mission), biblical references and suggestions as to the role of a monarch (especially as a "nursing father" of the Church), the superiority of the Church over the State justified by the Church's historical antecedence and by theological conviction of the superiority of things spiritual to those that are temporal (a superiority implying a union), a reference to "Father of the Church of England" idea of the union of Church and State, an idea of a link between religion, morality and politics (based on references to the Scriptures, Aristotle and Joseph Butler), which imply a necessary link between Church and State, financial advantages for the Church and her flock coming from the "subsidiary system" found only in the model of the union, and practical order brought to a society when it holds to moral and political rules presented by a Church.

The second kind of arguments consist of the following critical arguments as to the model of separation: its patterns did not exist in Christian Antiquity and do not exist in the English tradition (as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), biblical stories warning against the separation of society and political rulers from a Church and declaring God's punishment for that (especially 1 Sm 8), the detrimental consequences for the State were separation to come about (losing moral and political standards, the degeneration of society, predicted social disorder), and negative consequence for the Church in the case of separation (the lack of the State's nursing, for example of financial support).

"Can it be said which model of the union the Tractarians preferred?" I think it can and should be said. The presented arguments strongly indicate that the Tractarians's adhered to the model of union, some of them directly criticized the model of separation, and many of them did it indirectly. The Tractarian view on the separation of Church and State can be described as being generally negative; however, it may be still worth further descriptive research.

Of course these arguments or the Oxford Movement itself did not manage to prevent the advancing separation of Church and State, or the liberal reforms of the nineteenth century. The Tractarians and their arguments should be rather treated as the last big intellectual spurt of the English churchmen to maintain "the old order," and to contradict a major tenet of liberalism that advocated the separation of Church and State.

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