Notes from Fr. Nick

The Cambridge Movement

Last week I wrote about the Oxford Movement in 19th-century England. Besides Oxford, the other great university in Britain is Cambridge; it too had a religious movement in the early 1800s. While the Oxford Movement was primarily theological and historical, the Cambridge Movement was liturgical, architectural and sociological. Both movements shared some of the same leadership, and had similar foci.

The Cambridge movement began when the British government was planning to reduce the power of the Anglican Church over Catholics in Ireland. Some members of Parliament believed that it was unjust for Irish Catholics to be taxed for the maintenance of a Protestant church. This seemingly unrelated event set off a movement among liberals at Cambridge to reconstruct medieval society, which they believed was more humane than the industrial society then holding sway in England.

Gothic Revival architecture became the visible face of the Cambridge Movement, as scholars, liturgists and architects sought to revive the rites of the medieval church and its society and lifestyle. Adherents to the movement believed by creating the buildings and rituals of a former time, they could turn back the clock and make a happier society.

While the movement’s champions may seem naïve, their work did have some very positive results. All of the Gothic-style churches built in Britain and Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries owe their architecture to the Cambridge Movement. Architect and liturgist Augustus Welby Pugin (about whom I wrote my doctoral dissertation) carried this idea to building complexes of churches, hospitals and orphanages. He thought that if all the buildings were in place, people’s improved behavior would follow.

Along with Pugin, designer William Morris began the Arts and Crafts Movement (although the term was coined much later). They believed that simple, elegant, designs handcrafted by trained artisans would provide rewarding work and improve the lives of former factory workers and miners.

Artists of what is called the Pre-Raphaelite School rediscovered the beauty of Medieval art. Paintings by the likes of Rossetti and Burne-Jones jolted Neoclassical art with a colorful romanticism.

The movement failed to change British society, but many of its adherents found their faith in the process. Some — like Pugin and Burne-Jones — became Roman Catholics. In addition, we can thank the Cambridge Movement for inspiring St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City and comfortable Arts and Crafts furniture.

Friday Evenings: in Lent: The Stations of the Cross

After every Friday 5:30 pm Mass (about 6:00 pm), our community will gather with Fr. Ioane to pray the Stations of the Cross. Please mark your calendars to join us in this holy, meditative experience. (We have postponed the Soup Suppers until next year.)

Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

will take place in the Church after the 5:30 pm Mass (starting at approximately 6:05 pm) on all the Mondays of Lent. Please join us on one or all of these evenings for a sacred time of prayer with our Lord.