

JOHN KEBLE

THE LESSON: WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

*“Be angry and yet do not sin... give no opportunity to the devil.”
(Ephesians 4:26-27)*

The Reformation had begun as an “in house” critique of the Roman Catholic Church, but snowballed into a hard political and theological separation between Catholics and “Protestants” – as the Reformers came to be called. The movement swept through the western world, bringing changes too swift and drastic to be ignored. But while Reformers were convinced that these changes were right and good, others believed them to go too far, to be destructive of the Church’s unity, and theologically erroneous. A “Counter-Reformation” followed in which Catholics clarified, affirmed, and defended their beliefs. Though the period sparked many constructive meditations and arguments from writers and theologians, it also involved harsh retaliatory persecution and war in some regions. In England, where a “middle way” was sought, writers of both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Resurgence continued to inspire believers.

*“A wise son hears his father’s instruction.”
(Proverbs 13:1)*

John Keble was born in England in 1792 and home-schooled by his father, who was a scholar and a priest. From his parents, John learned to love the writings of the saints of previous ages, and especially the writers who had lived during the Catholic Resurgence in seventeenth century England. John was himself a brilliant scholar and won a scholarship to Oxford University at the age of 14.

John followed in his father’s footsteps, becoming a priest and taking on a tutoring position at Oxford. Six years later his mother died, and John took up the post of priest at a rural parish which allowed him to be near his father, turning down more prestigious appointments in order to remain there. Then, on the death of his sister, he became curate in his father’s church and remained close by till his father’s death.

During those years, John kept up a correspondence with friends and continued to assist some of the students he’d tutored at Oxford. Though John was not extroverted or ambitious, those who knew him looked up to him with great admiration. In 1827 John published a collection of poetry on the Christian calendar, a work intended to draw believers deeper into a practice of prayer and devotion. This book, titled “The Christian Year”, was an immediate success, and not long afterwards John was made professor of poetry at Oxford.

*“The hour has come for you to wake from sleep...
So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.”
(Romans 13:11-12)*

At this time the integrity of the Church was being undermined on multiple fronts. Government interference in Church matters was causing alarm, as was a general erosion of conviction, devotion and holiness among both clergy and laity. John was deeply concerned about this state of affairs and believed action was called for. On July 14, 1833, John preached a sermon in a chapel at Oxford on the theme of “National Apostasy”, which marked the starting point of what came to be known as “the Oxford Movement”.

John’s concerns were shared by many others, including E.B. Pusey and John Henry Newman, who came together in an effort to respond to a range of political, theological and pastoral issues. Together they published ninety “tracts” or pamphlets pointing people back to the faithful catholic teachings which were held by the early, undivided Church. They wished to re-ignite among believers a daily practice of prayer, and regular participation in Holy Communion. They also wanted to provide an explanation for matters of belief and practice which were at risk of being misunderstood or undermined. Those who identified with this “Oxford Movement” came to be known as “Tractarians”.

JOHN KEBLE

*“O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”
(BCP Psalm 96:9)*

John retired from Oxford in 1841, but continued to serve as a country vicar until his death at the age of 74. The movement which he helped to begin went on to have a lasting impact on the beauty and reverence of liturgy in Anglican churches, bringing about a fresh appreciation for the historic Christian tradition and the ongoing relevance of monastic vocations. It also inspired a new generation of “Tractarians” with a passion for “slum ministry” to devote their lives to bringing the beautiful and holy presence of Christ into the dark, impoverished neighbourhoods of industrialized England.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: ANGLICANHISTORY.ORG, PROJECT CANTERBURY, “JOHN KEBLE” AND “BEFORE AND AFTER THE OXFORD MOVEMENT” (MARY I.M. BELL) | BRITANNICA.COM, “JOHN KEBLE” AND “OXFORD MOVEMENT” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2” | PUSEYHOUSE.ORG.UK, “WHAT IS THE OXFORD MOVEMENT?”.)

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of John that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Discuss your reflections with a friend or a group of friends, and together commit to a concrete action you can take this week.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant John, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)