

Dr. Christopher Wells, Editor in Chief
The Living Church

To the Editor.

I enjoyed John D. Alexander's and Phoebe Pettingell's thoughtful article "The Persistence of Memory" in the December 4, 2011 issue. The article poses the perennial question of whether Anglo-Catholicism has a future and responds with a qualified "yes."

There have always been, the authors declare, three options for disgruntled Anglo-Catholics: secession, accommodation and witness. Some Anglo-Catholics who oppose the liberalization of eligibility requirements for ordination have chosen secession--as have many evangelicals for similar reasons. But Anglo-Catholics as a group are probably as "open and affirming" as other Episcopalians are. Reverence for tradition in the liturgy and sacraments does not necessarily correlate with conservative attitudes toward gender and other issues.

The healthiest of Alexander's and Pettingell's three options obviously is "witness," and that's where most Anglo-Catholics reside. As I point out in my book, *The Sacramental Church* (Wipf & Stock, 2011), Anglo-Catholicism has largely ceased to be a "sect" or sub-denomination. Instead it has become a leaven whose influence has spread throughout the Anglican Communion. For the foreseeable future some parishes, clergy and laypeople will continue to identify themselves as Anglo-Catholic. Meanwhile, the great majority of Episcopal parishes have absorbed practices that once were considered distinctively Anglo-Catholic. The Eucharist is now the main service on Sunday mornings; frequent communion has become the norm; priests, acolytes and choristers are vested; candles burn on altars; and incense is used on major festivals. Episcopalians are no longer scandalized by Marian devotions or someone's decision to join a religious order. Two-hundred years ago, any one of these practices would have caused outrage, even violence.

Those of us of a high-church orientation, who welcome these developments, may be in dialectical tension with others within the Episcopal Church. But such tensions have always existed within Anglicanism, and for the most part they have been respectful and creative. May that continue, to everyone's benefit.

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