

MICHAEL WHEELER

THE OLD ENEMIES

Catholic and Protestant in
Nineteenth-Century English Culture



CAMBRIDGE

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English Culture*

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*To the Warden and staff of
St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden,
the scholar's haven*

*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.
My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*

James 3.9-10

We live in a country which for three hundred years has been pervaded by a spirit of opposition to the Catholic Church. Everything round about us is full of antagonism to the Faith. The whole literature of this country is written by those who, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes consciously, assume an attitude of hostility to it.

Cardinal Manning

This is the supreme quarrel of all . . . This is not a dispute between sects and kingdoms; it is a conflict within a man's own nature — nay, between the noblest parts of man's nature arrayed against each other. On the one side obedience and faith, on the other, freedom and the reason.

Joseph Henry Shorthouse

Preface

Like so many literary projects, this one started life in a secondhand bookshop. During the 1990s, when scouring Carnforth Bookshop, near Lancaster, I came across a collection of twenty-four pamphlets entitled 'The Roman Catholic Question, 1850–1851'. Bound in with these pamphlets were a number of others, including a discourse by Nicholas Wiseman on the Gorham controversy, Sir Robert Peel's maiden speech on 'Papal Aggression', Gladstone's speech on the Ecclesiastical Titles Assumption Bill, Bishop Phillpott's pastoral letter to the clergy of the diocese of Exeter, and William Dodsworth's tract on Anglicanism. It struck me immediately that the huge subject of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in nineteenth-century England would be worth exploring in depth, when time allowed.

Five years later, having left the University of Lancaster, and then Chawton House Library and the University of Southampton, I was able to write virtually full-time. On reviewing the 'Catholic question' in the mid-nineteenth century, it turned out that historians such as Arnstein, Chadwick, Norman and Paz had been active in the field, but that no literary critic had written a wide-ranging study on the subject and thus brought out its wider cultural implications. Three literary studies were later published during the writing of this book: Michael E. Schiefelbein's *The Lure of Babylon: Seven Protestant Novelists and Britain's Roman Catholic Renewal* (2001) and Ian Ker's *The Catholic Revival in English Literature: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh, 1845–1936* (2003) both focus upon particular writers, and Susan M. Griffin's *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2004) examines the ways in which anti-Catholic themes are used by American and British novelists, many of them long forgotten, as a medium of general cultural critique.

The more I looked at the subject, the clearer it became that the divisions between the old enemies were both caused and exacerbated by a series of misreadings, and that the focus of my study should be upon the relationship

between spirituality and language, between the doctrinal and devotional content of Catholic and Protestant traditions and the tropes and symbols which are open to different readings and misreadings by friends and foes of each tradition.

To most English people today, the phrase 'Catholic and Protestant' evokes the 'troubles' over there in Northern Ireland and football matches between Celtic and Rangers up there in Scotland. Yet 'Catholic and Protestant' has a long history in England over which each succeeding generation has fought. In 1569, during the Catholic 'Rising of the North', Thomas Percy and his companions celebrated the Mass and burned copies of the Bible and the official Protestant prayer book. In 1969, leading English Catholics were writing articles about 'dialogue' and 'convergence' with Anglicanism: old enemies were becoming new friends. In the intervening four hundred years, England's holy wars were repeated again and again, in the political sphere and in the domains of theology and ecclesiastical history, literature and criticism, painting and architecture. Yet the religion over which these battles raged is based upon a message of love, of peace and of hope.

The Old Enemies asks why these ancient divisions are so deep, why they continued into the industrial age, and how the writers of that age – novelists and poets, historians and essayists, theologians and pamphleteers – reinterpreted them. The book thus creates a Victorian viewing platform from which the reader can see the history of 'Catholic and Protestant' in England, from the distant past to the present, from a new perspective.

In many ways, anti-Catholicism can be described as the hatred of one patriarchal institution by another. This book also examines the contribution that English women – Catholic and Protestant – have made to these debates. It considers the ways in which Catholics and Protestants have fought over history – especially the history of the early Church and the Reformation – and over the vexed question of authority, for Catholics grounded upon the rock of St Peter, for Protestants upon the rock of the 'Scriptures'. It discusses the tension in Protestantism between an ingrained sense of repulsion from Catholicism, with its 'unnatural' celibate priests, monks and nuns, its 'superstitions' and its 'idolatrous' foreign forms of worship, and an attraction – often at an unconscious level – to Catholicism's apparent unity, its claim to be the true Church, its Marian theology, its doctrine of purgatory as an intermediate state between earthly and heavenly existence, and above all its access to divine 'mystery', made real in the Mass. In terms of ecclesiastical history, these conflicts and tensions can be explained as the result of mutual misunderstanding and prejudice, and of passionate belief in what each side regards as an exclusive saving truth. In terms of cultural

history, the same conflicts and tensions are often to be found close to the source of the creative energy behind literature and the arts.

The Church of England is both Protestant and part of the 'Catholic and Apostolic Church'. Within Anglicanism I would describe myself as a Catholic, and within the Catholic wing of the Church of England a Modern Catholic – all very arcane to those outside Anglicanism's big tent. I write as an Anglican who is sympathetic towards the Roman Catholic Church. Today, as in the nineteenth century, 'Catholic' Anglicans do not like being called 'Protestants'. For the sake of concision, however, I use the term 'Protestant' in this book to mean all Anglicans and Protestant Dissenters taken together. Similarly, 'Catholic' means Roman Catholic, unless the context clearly indicates Anglo-Catholicism.

In exploring a wide field over a number of years, I have been supported by some remarkable people. My wife Viv was unfailingly supportive, especially when the going got rough. Three generous friends read all or part of the book, and special thanks are due to Michael Alexander, Olivia Thompson and Chris Walsh. Andrew Brown of Cambridge University Press encouraged me to write the book, and his colleague Linda Bree has been an excellent editor. Thanks, too, to all those who helped to get the book from computer to press, including Susan Beer, Alison Powell and Maartje Scheltens. I have also enjoyed and benefited from conversations with Graham Beck, Lida Kindersley, the late Linda Murray, Stephen Prickett and Trevor Robinson.

What started in a secondhand bookshop came to maturity in the British Library and at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. I am particularly grateful to The British Academy, which awarded me a travel grant, and to the staff of the Rare Books and Music Reading Room in the British Library. Also to the archival staff of Arundel Castle; St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden and its Warden, Peter Francis, and Librarian, Patricia Williams, to whom the book is dedicated; the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, where I was a Visiting Fellow in February 2004, and its Director, Professor Stephen Prickett, and his staff; the University of Southampton Library; the Morley Library of Winchester Cathedral, and the curator, John Hardacre; and the Thorold and Lyttelton Library of the Diocese of Winchester.

Work in progress towards this book is reflected in the following publications: "One of the larger lost continents": Religion in the Victorian novel', in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Francis O' Gorman (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 2004); 'The Variant and the Vatican: Catholic and Protestant Authority in Nineteenth-Century English Culture', in *Varianten – Variants – Variantes*, ed. Christa Jansohn

and Bodo Plachta, *Internationales Jahrbuch für Editionswissenschaften*, 22 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005); entries on 'Catholicism', 'Church of England', 'Keble', 'Manning', 'Newman', 'Religious literature', 'Wiseman', in *The Grolier Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era* (Danbury, CT: Scholastic, 2004).

I am grateful to owners for permission to reproduce the illustrations.

Note on referencing

Footnotes give short references to publications described more fully in the Bibliography. In the main text, when quoting from novels that are in print and readily available, chapter numbers only (with book or part numbers where appropriate) are given. The particular edition quoted is, however, listed in the Bibliography (Primary texts).

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: 'Papal Aggression'

The enemy has come.

*The Illustrated London News*¹

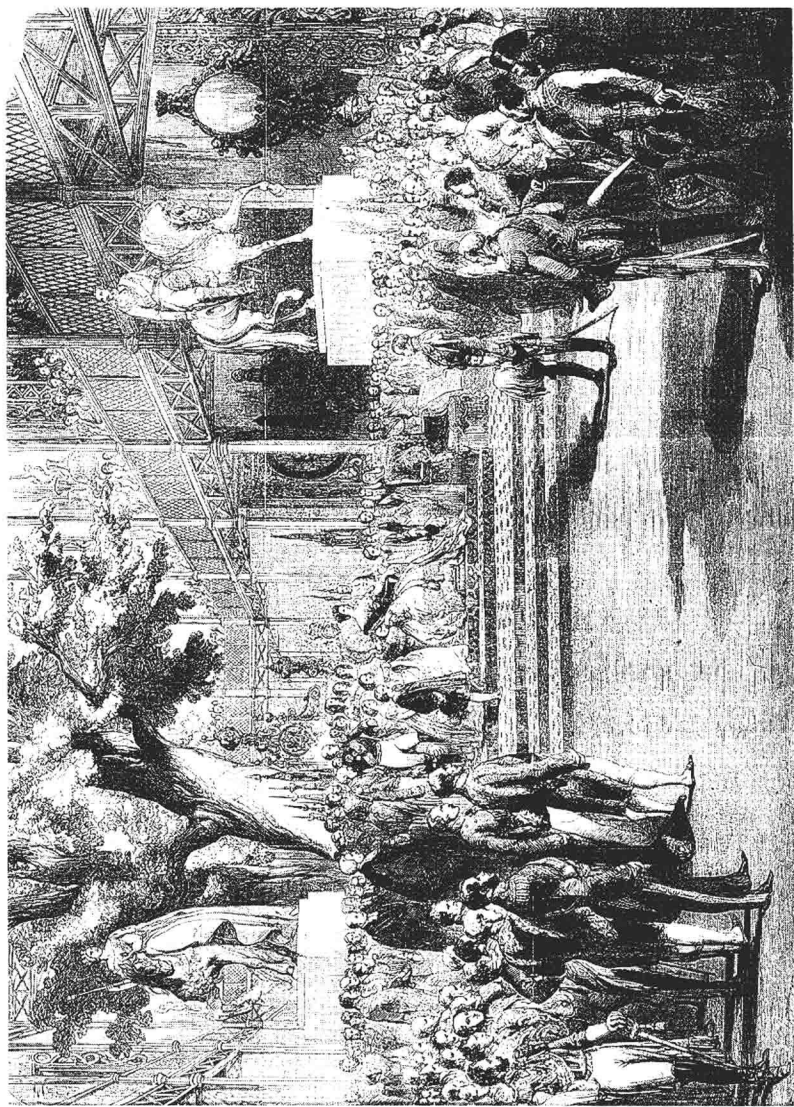
I

Queen Victoria sits on a raised throne at the opening of the Great Exhibition, listening to an address by her uniformed consort, Prince Albert, President of the Royal Commissioners (illustration 1). A less private communication between husband and wife is difficult to imagine. This couple have the highest profiles in the land and are here playing out their public roles. The speaker reads the address on behalf of a group. The listener attends to the address as the reigning monarch. The address is written with not only the royal listener in mind, but also the surrounding crowds of people, who themselves represent different constituencies, at home and abroad.

The Commissioners have encouraged exhibitors to send material from overseas and from all over Britain to London, capital of the world's first industrialized nation, where the latest products of modern manufacture can now be admired. The main political aim of the project is to display and celebrate Britain's own technological supremacy. Joseph Paxton's cathedral of glass, complete with 'nave' and 'transepts', is also a pleasure dome, a miracle of rare prefabrication. Large equestrian statues of the royal couple flank the dais. The galleries above are crowded with eager spectators. The tree that fills the space between the galleries has been cleared of birds by sparrow-hawks, on the advice of the aged Duke of Wellington, whose birthday it is today and who was cheered by the crowds on his arrival.

The opening of the Great Exhibition, on 1 May 1851, is a familiar enough scene. Two details are usually overlooked, however: the figures standing in

¹ Anon., 'The Papal Aggression', *Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1850, p. 358.



1. 'Inauguration of the Great Exhibition Building, by Her Majesty, May 1, 1851', *The Illustrated London News*, 18. 481
(3 May 1851), 350-1.

the foreground, facing Her Majesty, and the figure to her right, in front of the tree, who is dressed in a black gown, Geneva bands (like those of Swiss Calvinists) and a wig. The latter is the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner, whose role is to offer a special benediction, addressed to Almighty God on behalf of, and in the hearing of all who are present. This is to be followed by the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's *Messiah*.² Behind him stand other senior clerics, two of whom also wear wigs. The message is clear: the Church of England can give its blessing to modernity and to what the current Whig government at least regard as 'progress'. The figures in the foreground are foreign ambassadors, dressed in splendid ceremonial uniforms, and many of them are Catholics. They are witnessing a very English ceremony, mounted by Church and State. It is poised, polished, and Protestant.³ For Continental Catholics, it must seem like another world – economically, politically, culturally and, above all, spiritually.

One of the presiding clergy on the great day was Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, who had preached at the Queen's coronation back in 1838, and in 1850 had appointed a committee 'for providing foreigners and other strangers with the means of attending divine worship during the period of the Exhibition'.⁴ 'Let us not welcome them to this great emporium of the world's commerce', he said in his charge to the London clergy at St Paul's Cathedral, 'as though we looked only to the gratification of our national pride, or to mutual improvements in the arts, which minister to the enjoyment of this present life, and took no thought of the spiritual relation which subsists between all mankind as children of God, whom he desires to be saved through Jesus Christ'.⁵ Although Blomfield's tone would have appealed particularly to the Evangelicals among the London clergy, their Broad Church brethren and the (often troublesome) High Church Tractarians would have broadly agreed with their tenor. Yet most of them, particularly in the Evangelical and Broad Church parties, would also have believed that the historic links between Church and State under the Crown were the key to the nation's material prosperity, and that politics and religion were inseparable.⁶ Five years before the Duke of Wellington

² Anon., 'The Great Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, 3 May 1851, p. 349.

³ In her coronation oath, Queen Victoria had promised to 'maintain the Laws of God, the true Profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Religion established by Law', and had received a copy of the Bible, the 'most valuable thing that this world affords': Anon., *Form and Order of the Service* (1838), pp. 27, 41.

⁴ Anon., 'Great Industrial Exhibition of 1851', *Illustrated London News*, 23 November 1850, p. 399.

⁵ Anon., 'The Bishop of London's Charge', in Anon., *Roman Catholic Question* (1851), 2nd series, p. 12.

⁶ A conservative, Anglican weekly newspaper entitled the *Church and State Gazette* was published between 1842 and 1856.