

Victorian Piety and the Revival of Material Religion in Britain

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Introduction

Britain in the ‘long’ nineteenth century, though now remembered for its supposed secularization, seemed more striking, at the time, for its intense religious activity and many public expressions of Christian faith. Outward signs of inner Christian piety – Protestant and Catholic – increased dramatically across the British Isles between 1780, the year of the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots, and 1920, the year that the Church in Wales was disestablished. Protestant revivalism from the 1780s, followed by Catholic renewal from the 1830s, combined to give a new religious aesthetic to Christian practice in Britain. The result was a distinctively Victorian piety, sentimental or even mawkish to modern tastes, that was strongly influenced by Evangelical attitudes towards conversion and atonement, infused with Romantic nostalgia for the Middle Ages and touched by traditionally Catholic ideas of the sacramental. Spirituality became more rooted in the material as religious fashion shifted from a characteristically eighteenth-century ‘rational’ approach, based largely on written texts, to a more folksy nineteenth-century approach, in which Evangelical emphasis on religious feeling, Catholic revivalism, Romantic reverence for holy objects and places, sentimental focus upon the home and desire for tangible ‘proofs’ of the supernatural combined to make religious experience into something increasingly woven into the everyday and apprehended by the senses as well as by heart, mind and soul.¹

Material objects believed to symbolise, embody or evoke Christian piety ranged from devotional and liturgical aids to sacred places and from holy images and books to religious artefacts and plaster statues. Organ music, incense, religious pictures, candles, bell ringing, holy water and congregational hymn singing framed worship and religious devotions and set them apart from secular entertainments. Revivalist missions, open-air sermons, public confessions, recitations of the rosary, temperance pledges, religious processions, pilgrimages, Bible salesmen, carol singing, Salvation Army bands and much else besides brought religion out of doors and into the country’s high streets and village greens. Explicitly Christian architectural styles, at first used only for ecclesiastical purposes, came to seem appropriate for charitable, municipal, educational and other public buildings, including the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament. Clergymen, who

¹ I am grateful to the late John Bossy and the late David Goodall for their helpful comments on this chapter draft.

had once simply dressed as respectable gentlemen, adopted clerical uniform, including the Roman collar, as a mark of their 'professional' status. Nuns and monks, dressed in the distinctive habit of their particular religious order, by their physical presence reminded Victorians of the medieval origins of colleges, schools and hospitals as well as convents and monasteries. Children, organised into societies ranging from the Boy Scouts to the Children of Mary, carried banners or wore distinctive uniforms: the boys dressed in pseudo-military attire, prepared to serve God, Queen and country; the girls in chaste white dresses with a blue sash, the colour associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. The interiors of parish churches, once whitewashed and plain, were painted in bright colours, filled with flowers, lit with candles, covered with memorials and decorated with stained glass, statues and paintings.

Home life, which was punctuated by morning and evening prayers, Bible-reading, the saying of grace before meals, the keeping of the Sabbath, the following of the feast and fast-days of the liturgical year, became more distinctively and tangibly Protestant or Catholic through the display in the home of such items as holy pictures, crucifixes, Lourdes water or family Bibles, the wearing of special clothes on the Lord's Day, the eating of fish on Fridays, and many other denominationally distinct domestic rituals. Christian rites of passage, such as baptism, First Communion, weddings and funerals, loomed large in the social calendar. Rites of mourning were elaborately observed and cemeteries, set out to mirror the social distinctions of the living, took over vast urban spaces, such as at Highgate cemetery in London or the Necropolis in Glasgow. Increasingly elaborate and ritualised celebrations of Christian holidays, especially Christmas, mingled with commercialism and became, like the Sunday roast, a touchstone of respectable middle-class family life.

The material side of religion, which had been attacked during the sixteenth-century Reformation, suppressed by the Puritans in the seventeenth century and scorned by Deists in the eighteenth century, had long been absent from the religious scene in Britain. It came back with a vengeance in the nineteenth century. This broad shift in religious sensibility and taste, which owed a great deal to the Romantic Movement and had clear parallels in contemporary revivals on the Continent, most notably the German Protestant Pietist and French Catholic ultramontane movements, was particularly intense in the British Isles. The change in British attitudes can be explained in part as an emotional reaction, after the shocks of the French Revolution, to the overweening confidence that had been placed on reason during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, but widely discredited after regicide, secularization, war and terror. It can also be understood as a Romantic return to the simple, rustic piety cherished in the poems and songs of

William Wordsworth or Robert Burns, together with an awe and love for the Middle Ages as inspired by the writings of Sir Walter Scott. It can also be seen as a consequence of the gradual withdrawal of the state church in the face of increased religious competition, Protestant and Catholic, across the British Isles over the course of the ‘long’ nineteenth century.

From Church Establishment to Religious Pluralism

The nineteenth-century religious boom in Britain was accompanied by sharp population increases, the weakening of its two established churches, and a strong growth in denominational competition. In 1780, the Church of England still dominated the religious landscape of England and Wales. It was the Anglican Church, with its tasteful ceremonial, familiar liturgy and *Book of Common Prayer*, its Oxford-trained clergymen and gentlemen bishops, its distinctive blend of privilege, duty and quiet piety, that spoke for the nation and set the religious tone. The mid-eighteenth-century Methodist and early-nineteenth-century Evangelical movements within the Church of England, whose fire was ultimately to affect all the Christian denominations, had not yet been fully accepted in polite society. This was to change after the Methodist church broke away from the Church of England at the end of the eighteenth century and the Evangelical wing took its place within the Anglican establishment from the first decade of Victoria’s reign.

Roman Catholicism, which in 1780 was practised in Britain by a minority of so-called ‘Recusants’ or ‘Old Catholics’ to be found mainly in little pockets in London, Yorkshire, Lancashire and in the western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, offered no serious challenge either to the established Church of England or to the established Church of Scotland. In 1800, when the combined population of England and Wales was estimated at 8.9 million and the population of Scotland at roughly 1,610,000, there was as yet no Catholic community in Wales, fewer than 100,000 practising Catholics in England and barely 30,000 in Scotland. Old Catholics, conscious of being in a tiny, recently persecuted minority, were cautious and tactful in their articulation of the faith. Recusants ordinarily spoke of going to ‘prayers’ rather than to ‘Mass’, for example, and characteristically referred to themselves as ‘Christians’ rather than as ‘Catholics’.² *The Garden of the Soul*, the English Catholic prayer book first compiled in 1740 by London vicar-apostolic Richard Challoner and used by recusants throughout the British Isles, described itself simply as being for the use of ‘Christians who, living in the world, aspire to

² John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (London, 1975), p. 364.

devotion'.³ It was not until the 1830s and 1840s that Ambrose Phillips de Lisle and Father Ignatius Spencer began to promote the use of prayers 'for the conversion of England' or to insist on importing Italian devotions into English Catholic churches. Within a generation, some of these devotions and practices had become a standard part of nineteenth-century Catholic worship throughout Britain, helping to sharpen a sense of denominational difference that was being simultaneously emphasised in a myriad of other ways, not only in catechisms and prayer-books, but especially through the spread of Catholic schools and exclusively Catholic social, charitable and devotional societies.

Between 1780 and 1920, the Church of England, which was Anglican in theology, gradually gave way to reformist pressure, led by Nonconformist, Dissenting and Catholic lobbies, to remove most of its special privileges as the 'national' and 'established' Church of England and Wales. Britain's other established church, the Church of Scotland, which was Presbyterian, lost its hold over the 'Free Church' in the Disruption of 1843 and, from 1847, had to compete not only with the Free Kirk but also with the United Presbyterian Church. In Wales, which did not have its own national, established Church, the Church of England similarly lost out to dissent, especially Calvinist Methodism and Welsh Presbyterianism, over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. By the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth, separation from the 'English' church had become the goal of most Welsh Nonconformists, and four separate Welsh Disestablishment bills were put before Parliament.⁴ From the middle of the nineteenth century, Britain's established churches also had to cope with sharply increasing competition from the Catholic Church, whose ecclesiastical hierarchy was formally 'restored' to England and Wales in 1850 and to Scotland in 1878.

The long, drawn-out battle that took place over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century over the status of the dissenting and established churches of England and Scotland turned Victorian Britain into a religious marketplace that ended by offering a greater array of liturgical and devotional choice – Protestant and Catholic -- than perhaps any other Christian country in Europe. Earnestly proselytising denominations and sects often condemned, but also copied from, one another as each sought the most effective methods to transmit its own, denominationally distinct slant on the universally Christian message of salvation. This denominational competition

³ Richard Challoner, *The Garden of the Soul: A Manual of Spiritual Exercises and Instructions for Christians, Who, Living in the World, Aspire to Devotion* (London, 1740).

⁴ K. Robbins, 'Religion and Community in Scotland and Wales' in S. Gilley and W.J. Sheils, eds., *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1994), p. 376.

intensified outward religiosity as a variety of methods were sought to 'convert' nominal Christians to earnest religious practice. The new religiosity in turn left material traces, tangible objects of a symbolic kind, that help to illuminate the sensibilities and religious experiences of a variety of Victorian and Edwardian Christians. Material religion was especially pronounced in Catholic revivals, both Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic, which gloried in the tactile and sensual aspects of church worship and decoration; but was also present, for example in Bible pictures and religious keepsakes, among Protestant congregations.

In 1780, the Church of England arguably had legitimate claims to its established status in England. After all, in England -- despite the presence of a significant minority of Quakers, Catholics, Jews, Unitarians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and other Nonconformists and Dissenters -- a clear majority of the population identified themselves as Anglican and chose to attend services -- or at least to be married, buried or have their children christened in -- the local parish church. The case was less clear-cut in Scotland where, even though the established Church of Scotland was Presbyterian in structure and more Calvinist in theology than the English church, a sizable proportion of the population preferred to worship in alternative 'free' churches. In Wales, too, perhaps as many as half the people already attended Nonconformist or Dissenting services rather than those offered by the established 'Church of England in Wales'. But in Ireland, which had become bound to Great Britain through the Act of Union of 1800, it was impossible to defend the constitutional position on common-sense grounds. It was therefore in Ireland, where three-quarters or more of the population was made up of Catholics who refused to attend services offered by the Anglican 'Church of Ireland', and even the Protestant minority was mainly Presbyterian, that the requirement to support the Church of England seemed the most arbitrary and was the most widely resented.

The anomaly of Ireland, together with pressure from an increasingly vocal, self-confident and growing Nonconformist and Dissenting lobby in England and Wales, led the Westminster Parliament, over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century, gradually to ease the laws that since the seventeenth century had sought to restrict the influence of Roman Catholics, Dissenters and Nonconformists in public life. In Scotland, Calvinist, Presbyterian and Evangelical Nonconformists and Dissenters, followed by Catholics, similarly forced open the religious marketplace and pushed the Presbyterian Church of Scotland onto the defensive. Sustained public debate over theological questions, accompanied by the gradual lifting of religious restrictions and a sharp increase in evangelism and religious revivalism, led to what can almost be described as a second religious Reformation across Victorian Britain. Sparked by late-

eighteenth century Evangelicalism, spread by mid-century revivalist fervour, aided by Irish immigration in the 1840s and sustained by interdenominational competition, this Second Reformation turned Victorian and Edwardian Britain into an exceptionally active, energetic and visibly religious society.

Changes in religious expression that took place in nineteenth-century Britain were enabled, though not caused, by a series of parliamentary and church reforms that gradually wrested control from England to the other parts of the British Isles, and from the established Church of England to old and new religious Nonconformists and Dissenters. These changes began with piecemeal religious reforms undertaken in the late eighteenth century to pacify Ireland (the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778, 1791, 1793) and gained momentum with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, and the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832 that gave the Protestant Nonconformist and Dissenting lobby a greater voice in Parliament. Between roughly 1836 and 1906, Dissenters' principal grievances were gradually rectified through the introduction of the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths (1836), the Burials Act (1880), the admission of Nonconformists to degrees at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge (1854 and 1856, respectively) and to teaching posts and College fellowships (1870) and through the amendments to the 1870 and 1902 Education acts that gradually removed the Anglican monopoly over the state-funded religious education of schoolchildren.⁵

By 1920, only a very few Dissenting, Nonconformist and Catholic legal or political grievances still remained. Prejudices and mutual suspicions naturally took longer to fade: overt sectarianism continued to flourish not only in Northern Ireland, where it became notorious; but also in other areas of denominational and ethnic tension, such as Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow. The Church in Wales was formally disestablished in 1920, marking an end to the vestiges of Anglican control over Wales; the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which had been similarly upstaged by rival denominations, was disestablished a few years later, in 1929. The Church of England, although it retains its special status as England's established church to the present day, was from the second half of the nineteenth century divided into *de facto* High, Low and Broad Church groupings. This meant that Anglicans often had more in common, in their theological understandings and style of worship, with denominations outside the Church of England than they had with each another. Both the Church of England and the Church of

⁵ Frances Knight, *The Church in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 23-26.

Scotland also faced what had become serious denominational competition from the English and Scottish branches of the Roman Catholic Church. How this extraordinary change in the British religious landscape came about had a great deal to do with both Protestant evangelicalism and Catholic revivalism.

Evangelical Revival

The Evangelical Revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century revolutionised the way in which the Christian faith came to be practised and understood by many of its most vocal and energetic adherents. The ‘Methodist’ movement led by Anglican clergyman John Wesley in the eighteenth century had touched a group of especially earnest and energetic Anglican ‘saints’ who won a strong following among the poorer classes in the industrial villages of northern England and the eastern seaboard of the United States. Initially disdained and ridiculed by Georgian gentlemen and ladies as ‘enthusiasm’ (fanaticism), from the turn of the nineteenth century Evangelicalism, called ‘vital religion’ or ‘seriousness’ by its advocates, set the new religious tone that was to become so characteristic of the Victorian period and which gradually made overt religious intensity, active proselytising and direct appeals to the emotions respectable.

From about the last decade of the eighteenth century, leading Evangelicals such as William Wilberforce, Hannah More and others rejected what they saw as the complacent and undemanding approach taken to faith by self-styled Christians in polite society, complaining that it was too easy simply to give one’s vague assent to the doctrines and morality of Christianity. What was needed, they argued, was a complete revolution of the heart in which Christ, as Hannah More put it, was made ‘the principle of all human action, the great animating spirit of human conduct.’⁶ On his twenty-first birthday, in 1807, Edward Bickersteth, who was later to become renowned as a leading Evangelical preacher of the high Victorian period, confided to his diary, with characteristic sense of urgency: ‘Eternity is at stake, and I am trifling away the salvation of my soul. My soul asks the question, what shall I do to be saved?’⁷

‘Conversion’ to an earnest faith meant more to Evangelicals than simply seeking baptism or trying to follow Gospel injunctions. It also meant persuading nominal, lukewarm, indifferent or complacent Christians – initially the socially and materially advantaged, later the poor and disadvantaged, too – to take their own Christian faith more seriously, to make their vows and

⁶ Hannah More, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1791; 1808 edn), p. 146.

⁷ T.R. Birks, *A Memoir of the Revd E. Bickersteth* (1852), I, 39 as cited in I. Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact of the Victorians* (New York, 1976), p. 20.

confessions and prayers more real. Early Evangelical treatises that targeted the well-to-do included Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiries into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society* (1775) and *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* of 1797 together with Hannah More's *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1787) and *Christian Morals* of 1813 and William Roberts' *Portraiture of a Christian Gentleman* (1829).

The first Evangelical tract to reach a mass middle-class audience was John Angell James' *The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation*, which became an instant bestseller after its publication in 1834. 'You have lately been awakened, by the mercy of God', it began, 'to ask, with some degree of anxiety, that momentous question, "What shall I do to be saved?" 'No wonder,' it continued, 'you should be anxious; the wonder is, that you were not concerned about this matter before, that you are not deeply solicitous now, and that all who possess the word of God do not sympathise with you in this anxiety.'⁸ James, who was Congregational minister at Carr's Lane, Birmingham, used this kind of immediate, personal rhetoric to bring his listeners to a horrified sense of their own sinfulness and so to seek Jesus and throw themselves on God's mercy. As James reassured those tempted to despair: 'Millions in heaven are already saved, and myriads more are on the road to salvation. God is still willing and Christ is still as able to save you as he was then.'⁹

Evangelical 'conversion' typically led not only to more frequent and fervent prayer and self-scrutiny and to the active cultivation of virtues such as honesty, sobriety, chastity and the attempt to avoid such vices as gluttony, avarice, idleness, intemperance and pride, but also to active engagement in the world through philanthropy and charity. The sorts of techniques being revived within the Church of England by the Evangelical movement – including the public confession of sins to seek forgiveness, the use of hell-fire sermons to stir consciences, and the vehicle of open-air prayer-meetings to express praise, joy and thanksgiving -- had obvious precedents in the Calvinist, Methodist, Baptist and other Low Church Protestant traditions. What is less often noticed is that these Protestant revivals, with their strong emphasis on the need for individual salvation and saving grace, also had clear parallels with the 'missionary' techniques being popularised in England and Scotland from about the same time by Catholic religious orders such as the Passionists, Redemptorists, Marists and Jesuits. Catholic missions, a pronounced feature of Irish Catholic life in the second half of the nineteenth century, were nearly as prominent a feature in the rest of the British Isles, where they targeted not only locals, but also

⁸ John Angell James, *The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation* (1834). There were many subsequent editions.

⁹ James, *The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation*.

large numbers of nominally Catholic Irish immigrants who had fled the Great Famine of 1845-9 and sought work in England, Scotland or Wales. Revivalist meetings were intended to lead penitents to denominationally specific ends (baptism or the renewal of baptismal vows in the Protestant case and confession and regular Mass attendance in the Catholic). There was nevertheless a strong family resemblance between the techniques, language and atmosphere of Protestant and Catholic revivals that suggests at the very least shared religious tastes between sharply opposed Christian denominations.

The Bible

Evangelism meant seeking to convert. As a first logical step, this meant spreading the ‘Good News’ by bringing the Bible – the all-important Word of God – to those who remained ignorant of it. The Sunday School movement, as launched by the Evangelical Hannah More at the turn of the century, set out to teach poor children to read rather than to write, since its primary purpose was to ensure that even ragged factory girls and the rural poor were able to read their Bibles. ‘The grand object of instruction’ at Sunday School, as Hannah More explained to a friend, ‘is the Bible itself... the great thing is to get it faithfully explained, in such a way as shall be likely to touch the heart and influence the conduct.’¹⁰ In 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded, initially to ensure that God’s word was made accessible to Welsh-speakers. The Society was able to capitalise on the technical advances of ‘stereotyping’ in printing that sharply brought down the cost of typesetting. This enabled the Church of England’s King James, or ‘Authorized Version’, of the English Bible to be translated into foreign languages and distributed cheaply around the world as well as at home. With characteristically grand Evangelical ambition, the Bible Society sought to ensure that every living person in the world, however poor, remote or uneducated, would eventually own his or her own, personal copy of the Bible.

Differences over theological emphases in different collections and translations of sacred scripture led to competition among rival editions of the Bible. In 1825, the Glasgow and Edinburgh branches withdrew from the British and Foreign Bible Society over a controversy about the inclusion of the *Apocrypha* and Metrical Psalms, becoming what later became known as the Scottish Bible Society. A similar controversy in 1831 led to the secession of the Unitarians, who formed their own Unitarian Bible Society. Richard Challoner’s translation of the Bible for the use of English-speaking Catholics, the Douai-Rheims Bible of 1752 (which

¹⁰ *The Mendip Annals*, ed. A. Roberts (1859), p. 8, as cited in Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 45.

borrowed heavily from the King James version), remained the standard Bible for British Catholics throughout the nineteenth century. Successive nineteenth-century editions of the Douai Bible, however, increasingly emphasised Catholic points of difference from the King James version; and Challoner's translation was eventually superseded in 1913 by the first in what was to become a series of distinctively 'Westminster versions' of Holy Scripture for the use of Catholics in Britain. One result of this evangelical effort was that knowledge of the Bible spread spectacularly over the course of the nineteenth century, achieving one of the Victorians' most cherished goals. At the same time, denominational barriers became sharper and more distinct as more and more rival versions of the Bible came into circulation, each authorized only for its particular sector of the Christian population.

Bibles, which were often imposing physical objects, took on special significance in the Victorian home as well as in church. Important family events, such as births and deaths, were recorded in their pages. Objects of sentimental value, such as a flower from a wedding or the lock of a baby's hair, were often pressed within its pages. As Colleen McDannell has pointed out, images of the family gathered to listen to Father authoritatively reading from the Bible in the kitchen, as in the widely reproduced nineteenth-century engraving of Jean-Baptist Greuze's *Père de Famille*, or else in the front parlour (as in the accompanying illustration to 'Evening Devotions' in *Godey's Lady's Book*) became a commonplace of Victorian sentimental domestic art. Similarly stereotyped images of a gentle mother listening to her child's bedtime prayers, or tenderly reading the Bible to a child, perhaps with an arm draped about the little one's shoulders, complemented the male stereotype of the authoritative *paterfamilias* with the female stereotype of the 'angel in the house'.¹¹ In some Nonconformist homes, enormous, leather-bound copies of the Good Book were made into venerable objects that were placed on a lectern or table in the front parlour, a room set aside for Sunday visitors rather than for everyday use.

Superstitions were often attached to the Bible. In the Scottish countryside, according to Robert Burns, Bibles were sometimes used for divination. The notion that an open Bible would help a woman in labour and protect her newborn baby from harm appears to have been widespread in the Scottish Highlands and in the slums of Glasgow.¹² The common English superstition that anyone who dared to perjure himself when swearing on a Bible would be struck dead is tacitly acknowledged to this day in the courtroom practice of taking the oath before

¹¹ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 73; 77; 81.

¹² Iona Opie and Moira Tatem, eds., *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford, 1989), 23.

giving testimony. By the late 1860s, Bible Women were being paid ten shillings a week to take Bibles to the poorest areas of London and persuade the destitute to buy a Bible for a shilling, paid in weekly instalments of a penny.¹³ By the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, armies of clergymen, Bible women and door-to-door salesmen had ensured that just about every household in Britain possessed a copy of the Bible – even in homes where not everyone was capable of reading it. The crusade was carried on, throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, by the American Gideon society, which sought to place a free Bible in every hotel room across the United States and its hotels abroad; and by the Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), whose distinctive version of the Bible included their own, additional ‘Book of Mormon’. By the end of the nineteenth century, Bibles had become at once much more accessible and widespread, but also more denominationally distinct – and sometimes divisive -- than at its beginning. The sense of denominational difference was only sharpened by controversies over literal readings of Genesis, the humanity of Jesus and other disputes in Biblical Criticism, often brought over from Germany and France, that preoccupied the Victorians from the 1830s to the 1880s, and were given added impetus from the 1860s in the wake of the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*.¹⁴

Church Architecture and Decoration

The most obvious material change in the religious landscape of Great Britain over the course of the ‘long’ nineteenth century was the sheer increase in the number of church, chapel and other Christian buildings that sprang up in towns and across the countryside as each denomination sought to keep up with population increases and the dislocation of people associated with immigration and industrial and urban sprawl. In 1818, Parliament voted that a million pounds be spent on restoring and building churches, mainly in the north of England where the accelerated population of the industrial towns had outstripped existing structures. This led to a boom in church building. In the 29 years between 1801 and 1830, for example, just 447 Church of England churches were built or rebuilt; but in the 24 years between 1851 and 1875 the figure had jumped to 2,438.¹⁵ The style in which the Church Commissioners chose to build these new churches and attached ecclesiastical buildings was English Gothic.

¹³ Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, p. 48.

¹⁴ For a concise account of ‘Science and Religion’, see Mary Heimann, ‘Christianity in Western Europe from the Enlightenment’ in A. Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (London, 1999), pp. 490-7.

¹⁵ See Gerald Parsons, ‘Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism’ in G. Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 1 (Manchester, 1988), p. 25, note.

Georgian neo-classicism, which had dominated eighteenth-century taste, was emphatically rejected by the Victorians as a pagan style, inappropriate for a Christian country, ‘What have we, as *Christians*’, as Augustus Welby Pugin, one of the most influential architects of the early Victorian age, put it, ‘to do with all those things illustrative *only of former error*? Is our wisdom set forth by the owl of Minerva, or our strength by the club of Hercules? What have we (who have been redeemed by the sacrifice of our Lord himself) to do with the carcasses of bulls and goat?’¹⁶

Although it was widely agreed that the specifically Christian architecture of the Middle Ages contained the most appropriate set of symbols to reiterate ancient Christian values, this still left open the possibility of choosing from a number of possible styles. The early English style of Gothic was judged by most Victorians too crude and heavy, too obviously influenced by its Norman antecedents, a style in its ‘infancy’; whereas fifteenth-century ‘decorated’ Gothic was argued to be in its corruption and decay. Only the middle style, fourteenth-century ‘pointed’ English Gothic, was argued to be at the prime of life, at its most ripe and (favourite word) ‘manly’. In 1834, Pugin’s love of ‘pointed’ Gothic went so far as to persuade him to convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism on the grounds ‘that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true one, and the only one in which the grand and sublime style of church architecture can ever be restored’.¹⁷ Two years later, he brought out his polemical, hugely influential tract contrasting the supposed ugly and heartless utilitarianism of nineteenth-century English architecture and society with the supposed Christian charity and inclusiveness of medieval times as *Contrasts: or A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day. Shewing the Present Decay of Taste*. The message was one that led to increased interest not only in medieval architecture, but also in medieval art, decoration and, by extension, theology, spirituality and liturgy.

Liturgical Renewal and Ritualism

As John Henry Newman, a clergyman don responsible in the 1820s and 1830s for recruiting and training the next generation of Anglican clergymen, later wrote in his spiritual autobiography, the Church of England then seemed in ‘general need of something deeper and more attractive than

¹⁶ A. Welby Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (London, 1841; New York, 1973 edn.), p. 54.

¹⁷ As cited in K. Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (London, 1950), p. 169.

what had offered itself elsewhere.’¹⁸ The Anglican church, Newman argued, ‘must have a ceremonial, a ritual, and a fullness of doctrine and devotion... if it were to compete with the Roman Church with any prospect of success’, since the Roman Catholic church ‘alone, amid all the errors and evils of her practical system, has given free scope to the feelings of awe, mystery, tenderness, reverence, devotedness, and other feelings.’¹⁹ John Keble’s *The Christian Year* (1827), the work of a young Oxford theologian that offered Romantic Christian poetry for every Sunday in the year, sought to fill the gap that Newman and other Anglicans sensed. *The Christian Year*, though initially considered effeminate by some old-school Anglicans, went into over one hundred editions and quickly became ‘not only a cherished classic’ but also a ‘sacred book’ to be placed beside Bible and Prayer-Book in the Anglican canon.²⁰

In 1833, after what appeared to a circle of Oxford-based Anglican clergymen to be the latest in a series of alarming instances of governmental interference in the established Church of England (the suppression of some bishoprics in Ireland), John Keble launched what came to be known as the Tractarian or Oxford movement by preaching at the university church in Oxford on the theme of ‘National Apostasy’. The series of polemical essays that followed, all published by Oxford clergymen dons between the years 1833 and 1845 as ‘Tracts for the Times’, earned their authors the scornful name of ‘Tractarians’ after their methods or ‘Puseyites’ after Edward Bouverie Pusey, their leader; it has more commonly been known since as the ‘Oxford Movement’. Those within the Church of England who remain inspired by its theological, devotional and ritual reforms, and are sometimes called ‘Ritualists’, are better known today as ‘High Church Anglicans’ or ‘Anglo-Catholics’.

The *Tracts for the Times* were prompted by what seemed to their Anglican authors to be the imminent threat of Church disestablishment in the face of persistent Nonconformist and (Roman) Catholic pressure. They therefore initially focussed a good deal of their attention on the sinfulness of the interference in spiritual matters by outside bodies and the dangers inherent in the separation of church from state. But they justified the privileged position of the Church of England on grounds that were theologically contentious, namely that the Anglican church was unique among all other Christian churches in Britain in alone preserving the continuity of apostolic succession. To Newman and Keble in particular, the best defence of the Church of

¹⁸ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York, 1956).

¹⁹ Newman, *Apologia* (1956 [1864]), p. 262.

²⁰ J. C. Shairp, Introduction to Everyman’s Library edition of *The Christian Year* by John Keble (London and New York, n.d.), p. ix.

England lay in the claims for its catholicity or universality, and they returned to the Anglican divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to find grounds for affirming its status as the true church of Christendom.

The broadly Catholic arguments with which even the earliest *Tracts for the Times* tried to justify the position of the Anglican Church quickly hit a nerve with those Evangelical clergy whose own defence would naturally have been Protestant. Low Churchmen's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and deep mistrust of any resemblance to the Roman Catholic church, symbol to them of all that was corrupt in Christendom, led them to react swiftly to what they saw as the theological errors of the Oxford men. As the Evangelical newspaper the *Christian Observer* began to critique what it termed the 'extraordinary doctrines' of the Tractarians, unprecedented numbers of undergraduate students continued to flock to Newman, Pusey and Keble's lectures and the fame (or notoriety) of the *Tracts for the Times* to spread. Increasingly, the *Tracts for the Times* were moving towards a full-blown defence of the Anglican position as what Newman termed a *Via Media*, or middle way, between what he presented as the twin extremes of 'Popery' (Catholicism) on the one hand, and 'Puritanism' (Calvinism) on the other. In the attempt to show that the English church, not the Roman, was the true descendant of the ancient church, Tractarians revived many practices that had been unknown in England since the seventeenth century and which smacked of 'popery' even to mainstream Anglicans. Lights, altars, tables, incense, clerical dress, indeed most of the trappings of medieval Catholicism, began to be restored to showpiece Tractarian churches like St Mary's in Oxford, amid an increasing public unease which, by the 1840s, had turned to a storm of controversy and publicity.

Architectural and liturgical enthusiasm for Gothic revival and neo-medievalism spread to parish churches around the country, and also to the other ancient English university, the University of Cambridge. In 1839, John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb formed the Cambridge Camden Society, whose aim was to build new churches in the style of fourteenth-century Gothic and to restore existing churches to a more Catholic use, by removing the focus from the pulpit (which implied the Protestant function of a preaching-house) to the sanctuary and altar (which placed emphasis on the sacrament of holy communion as a sacrifice). The dangers were becoming apparent. As a Protestant Minister warned, in a published sermon of 1844: 'as Romanism is taught analytically at Oxford, it is taught artistically at Cambridge... it is inculcated theoretically at the one university and it is sculptured, painted and graven at the other.'²¹ Like

²¹ As cited in K. Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (London, 1950), p. 228.

Pugin and the Tractarians, the Camdenians continued in a Catholic direction. Neale not only published translations of hymns from the ancient Eastern churches but, from the 1840s onwards, actually went so far as to begin re-establishing religious communities within the Church of England. This was at the same time that a bewildering variety of Roman Catholic orders – English, Irish, French, Belgian, Italian and other – were rapidly being deployed around the British Isles to cope with population increases, especially through Irish immigration, into the great industrial cities of northern England and the central belt of Scotland. It was also a decade of widespread revivalist missions, Protestant and Catholic, which charged the religious atmosphere and sometimes stoked sectarian fires.

In 1841, Newman published his famous Tract 90 that actually stated outright that the articles of the Church of England were ‘patient of [i.e. open to] a Catholic interpretation’.²² In the storm of controversy that followed, and the official condemnation of the Tract by the University of Oxford, Newman gradually gave up his university position and withdrew to Littlemore, a few miles away from the city. Four years later, he shocked not only Evangelicals but also his High-Church friends, by being received into the Catholic Church, an act that ended the Tractarian Movement and led to a major theological crisis within the Church of England. A significant number of Newman’s followers, W.G. Ward and Frederick Faber among them, followed his example and left the Church of England to be received into the English Catholic Church, beginning a tradition of high-profile British converts to Rome.²³ Those who stayed behind, most notably John Keble and Edward Bouverie Pusey, remained as leaders of the High Church, ‘Anglo-Catholic’ or ritualist wing within the established church. One of the Oxford Movement’s long-term legacies was to leave the Church of England divided into Low, Broad and High Church groupings that sometimes had more in common with outside denominations – Protestant Nonconformist or Roman Catholic – than with each other. On the other hand, more intense Anglican participation in church, thanks to both Evangelical and Catholic revivals, had become the norm. In the 1830s, for example, most Anglican churches offered communion just four times

²² [J.H. Newman], *Tract 90. Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles*. See also E.B. Pusey, *The Articles treated on in Tract 90 [by J. H. Newman] reconsidered and their interpretation vindicated in a letter to ... R. W. Jelf. ... With an appendix from Abp. Ussher on the difference between ancient and modern addresses to Saints* (Oxford and London, 1841).

²³ W.G. Gorman, *Converts to Rome: A Biographical List of the More Notable Converts to the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom during the Last Sixty Years* (London, 1910), listed approximately 4,000 converts to Catholicism during the half-century that followed the Oxford Movement.

a year. By the end of the century, weekly communion was the norm for all Anglican places of worship. In Low Church parishes, communion might be followed by prayer-meetings, revivalist missions and Bible study groups; in High Church parishes, it might be supplemented by Matins, Lauds, Evensong and all the other daily offices that had once been the preserve of Catholic monasteries and convents.

Catholic Revival

At just about the same time that the Evangelical Revival and Oxford Movements were converting the British establishment to a more intensely religious life, the Roman Catholic population of the British Isles increased so sharply – largely through Irish immigration in the 1840s – that British Catholicism came out of the shadows and took its place as yet another denomination that needed to be reckoned with politically and practically.²⁴ By mid-century, the Vatican agreed to remove Britain’s status as a ‘missionary’ territory and to allow a fully-fledged ecclesiastical hierarchy formally to represent and cater for its Catholic populations. The Catholic hierarchy was duly ‘restored’ to England and Wales in 1850 and, after further campaigning, to Scotland in 1878. Although the ‘restoration of the ecclesiastical hierarchy’ meant little more, in practice, than allowing Catholic ‘vicars-apostolic’ to be called ‘bishops’ and ‘missionary territories’ to become ‘dioceses’, a triumphalist speech made by the English Catholic archbishop Nicholas Wiseman ‘out of the Flaminian Gate’ in Rome and subsequently reported in alarmist terms by the British press prompted widespread fears that this ‘papal aggression’ was only the first step in a plot to overturn Britain’s hard-won Protestant settlement. Violent anti-popery riots followed, lasting for days in London and other major cities.

The fear of Catholicism became widespread in Britain at mid-century partly because of the notion of ‘papal aggression’, but also because of a brisk trade in salacious tales of young girls supposedly walled up in convents or held captive by wily Jesuit priests, together with the active promotion of such fears through the lecture tours and polemical pamphlets put out by energetic anti-Catholics such as Mr Newdegate.²⁵ Catholicism was also seen as threatening because of the

²⁴ Reliable, clear-cut figures for the number of Anglicans, Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and other Nonconformist and Dissenting Christians living in nineteenth-century Britain do not exist. Apart from inconsistencies in the gathering of statistical data, the nature of the information gathered does not always allow for the comparison of like with like across denominations. The most reliable estimates for overall figures and patterns of growth can be found in R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977) but are too lengthy and discursive to be reproduced here.

²⁵ See W.L. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr Newdegate and the Nuns* (New York, 1982).

scale of Irish immigration of the 1840s, because the Oxford Movement had resulted in the sensational conversions of a number of prominent Anglican clergy, because there was a visible increase in Catholic buildings -- including churches, schools and religious houses -- and because a great deal of public Catholic worship and devotion seemed foreign and alien to local Protestant sensibilities. Only in the longer term did the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy give Catholics and others the sense that Catholicism in Britain was for the first time since the Reformation being treated as an 'official' religion, a legitimate denomination rather than a treasonous sect.²⁶

Devotional Revolution

In the 1840s and 1850s, during what has come to be known as the Catholic Revival, the tone and presentation of the Catholic message as preached across the British Isles changed. Going to confession and taking the Blessed Sacrament stopped being treated as fearful privileges to be reserved for the most solemn occasions in the liturgical year, but became a weekly – or even daily – habit for those who aspired to holiness. Hagiographies began to stress, rather than to seek to explain away, wonders and miracles surrounding the lives of the saints. Clergy, formerly treated as little different from other professionals, came increasingly to be set apart as different, as holy. The previously notorious Jesuits and a range of contemplative orders, whose very right to exist had been widely questioned during the Enlightenment, were now held up to admiration as among the most spiritually advanced. The Papacy, personified in the person of Pius IX, the 'Prisoner in the Vatican', became the object of empathetic prayers, Peter's Pence collections and rousing English Catholic hymns such as 'God Bless Our Pope'.

Together with changes in the tone and emphases in Catholic preaching and hagiography in the British Isles came a dramatic rise in the provision and popularity of a whole range of extra-liturgical practices known as devotions, some of which had a distinctly medieval flavour. Whereas only a tiny fraction of Catholic churches in Britain up to the 1840s had offered Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament (a distinctively English Catholic version of a service culminating with the blessing of the congregation by the Blessed Sacrament in an elaborate monstrance), by 1900 nearly 90% of all English Catholic churches catered for weekly, or even daily, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the most popular slot being 7 or 8 pm on Sunday evening. Similarly, the service of the Rosary, another Catholic devotional extra in which the congregation, usually led by a priest, recited the Dominican rosary of 15 decades, had been

²⁶ John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 49-62.

scarcely represented in the Catholic churches of England, Scotland and Wales up to the 1840s; by the end of the century, however, it was offered by 80% of all churches.²⁷ The Franciscan Lenten devotion known as the Stations or Way of the Cross (*via crucis*), in which the penitent empathetically meditates on the stages of Christ's suffering and crucifixion, became available in all dioceses – and perhaps as many as a fifth of all churches – by the 1860s, though it did not complete its spread to more or less all Catholic churches until about the middle of the twentieth century.²⁸ Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a pious practice closely associated with contemporary French Catholic spirituality and whose special Mass and Office of the feast was extended to the whole Church by Pius IX in 1856, became more prominent in English Catholic prayer books from about 1875.²⁹

Catholic devotions were spread and promoted with particular effectiveness through an increasingly vast network of Catholic schools and a host of exclusively Catholic devotional clubs, associations and societies known as confraternities, sodalities or guilds, whose revival and rapid spread from the 1850s was another marked feature of nineteenth-century Catholicism. Some of these societies, known as Third Orders, offered lay Catholics the opportunity to take part in the religious life of a chosen religious order, most commonly the Order of St Francis or Order of St Dominic, yet without committing themselves so far as to become actual novices. Those who took their status as a 'tertiary' seriously might choose to wear a scapular, or symbolic yoke, of their chosen order underneath their clothes, or perhaps to keep a discrete 'rosary ring' or rosary beads in their pocket for counting off their Hail Marys and Our Fathers. Other devotional societies, such as the Children of Mary or the Catholic Boys' Brigade, were aimed at young girls or boys (the sexes were strictly segregated) with an eye to keeping them chaste and pious through the particularly tricky stage of adolescence. Still other Catholic confraternities, such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, existed primarily to help the poor; or, like the Temperance Guild of Our Lady and St John or the Association of the Cross, to combat a specific social evil, alcoholism in this case, through the use of distinctively Catholic prayers and devotional practices.

The vast majority of devotional societies, which consisted of a bewildering variety of Rosary, Blessed Sacrament, Sacred Heart, Holy Family, Immaculate Conception, Immaculate

²⁷ All Catholic churches in England and Wales advertised their mass times and extra-liturgical services in annual editions of *The Catholic Directory and Annual Register*. It is from these figures that the percentages cited here have been calculated.

²⁸ For the exact figures, see table 1, appendix 1 and figures 1-14, appendix II, in Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 174-190. The results are discussed on pp. 40-45 of the same work. See also Bernard Aspinwall, 'Catholic Devotion in Victorian Scotland' (2008), 32-33.

²⁹ Heimann, *English Catholic Devotion*, p. 44.

Heart, Way of the Cross, Precious Blood and countless other confraternities, sodalities and guilds, were explicitly spiritual rather than social in that they sought to focus their members' attention on a particular devotional practice and, through it, to strengthen commitment to a discrete aspect of Catholic doctrine. The spread of devotional societies, especially through parish churches and convent schools, led to the increased use of images such as the 'miraculous medal', the Sacred Heart and the Holy Family, all of which were often included in prayer-books and appendices to catechisms from the 1870s. Images of St Bernadette, bottles of Lourdes water and replicas of the Lourdes grotto came to Britain, by way of France, somewhat later, starting in the 1880s (which was also when the first English Catholic pilgrimages to Lourdes began to be held), and reached new heights of popularity in the first half of the twentieth century.

At the same time that Catholic expectations of worship and devotion were becoming more intense and demanding, Catholics were becoming increasingly segregated from non-Catholics. Educated separately wherever possible, strongly discouraged from marrying outside the fold, and urged to participate more frequently in denominationally specific rites of passage and communal events such as retreats, processions and pilgrimages, Catholics found their everyday experience to be increasingly different from that of non-Catholics.³⁰ This 'cradle-to-grave' Catholicism created what has also been called 'the Catholic ghetto', a network of educational, recreational, religious, charitable and welfare provision that effectively separated Catholics and Protestants from each other at the same time that, paradoxically, their religious tastes, sensibilities and morality were growing to have so much in common.

Holy Pictures

Holy pictures used for contemplation by British Christians were often imported from the Continent: French and Belgian images were especially widespread among Catholics, German and Dutch designs among Protestants. The Nazarene style, which combined the ideals of Classicism and the early Italian Renaissance, became the favourite idiom, in Britain as on the Continent, in which to paint nineteenth-century popular religious images, from distinctly Catholic images of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sacred Heart or the saints to Bible illustrations of the Good Shepherd aimed at Protestants. This was the style in which the vast majority of prayer cards, holy pictures and pious reproductions to be displayed in the home were painted or drawn, and in which devotional objects sold at Catholic sites of pilgrimage were usually portrayed. 'Even in neo-

³⁰ See Eric Tenbus, *English Catholics and the Education of the Poor, 1847-1902* (London, 2010)

Gothic altarpieces, or on holy cards with Gothic framing’, as von Achen points out, ‘the pictures themselves most often do not appear in Gothic style, but in this tradition of the Nazarene movement in which sweeter versions of classicist features, perhaps in medieval costumes, lived on through the nineteenth century.’³¹

Although now largely forgotten in Britain, the Nazarene circle of German painters, and especially Friedrich Overbeck, were highly prized by the Victorians for their view of the function of art as moral and religious. Their work can be shown to have directly influenced Charles Eastlake, a president of the Royal Academy and the first director of the National Gallery in London, as well as the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, most notably Holman Hunt and Ford Madox Brown. Indeed, when the manuscript of what was eventually published as the first volume of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* was first offered to the London publisher John Murray in the 1840s, he is said to have turned it down with the comment that he might have been interested if Ruskin had offered him a book on the Nazarenes instead.³²

Sunday School religious pictures were didactic, but also sentimental and designed to be approachable and accessible. While God the Father, a stern patriarch, might be too frightening to approach directly, Jesus Meek and Mild carrying a woolly lamb on his shoulders or ‘suffering the little children’ to come unto him could be turned to with confidence. For Catholics, a similar contrast was drawn between God the Father and God the Holy Ghost, who a Convent schoolgirl remembered as ‘awe-inspiring conceptions, Presences who could only be addressed in set words and with one’s mind, as it were, properly gloved and veiled’, as opposed to ‘Our Lady and the Holy Child and the saints’ to whom she felt able to speak ‘as naturally as to her friends.’³³ The notion of the Blessed Virgin Mary in particular as a beautiful, comforting, gentle and forgiving intercessor, a loving mother who would not scold, was especially attractive to nineteenth-century sensibilities, and may help to account for the sharp rise in both Marian devotion and the sacrament of Penance (confession).

The single most popular painting of the late Victorian period, ‘The Light of the World’ by William Holman Hunt, one of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, was closely based on the Nazarene painter Philipp Vent’s similar depiction of 1824. Holman Hunt’s famous image of Christ knocking at a door, originally painted between 1851 and 1853 and recopied in life-size between

³¹ Henrik von Achen, ‘Medieval Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Art and Architecture’ in H. Laugerud and S. Ryan, eds., *Devotional Cultures of European Christianity, 1790-1960* (Dublin, 2012),. 138.

³² See <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn03/73-autumn03/autumn03article/273-unwilling-moderns-the-nazarene-painters-of-the-nineteenth-century>

³³ Antonia White, *Frost in May* (London, 1978 [1933]), pp. 45-46.

1900 and 1904, was taken on a tour of the colonies in 1905 where it is estimated to have been seen in the flesh by about 7 million people. ‘The Light of the World’, as iconic and well-known a painting in the late nineteenth century as the Mona Lisa became in the twentieth, was in effect a sermon in oils, a religious commentary on Revelation chapter 3, verse 20: ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him and will sup with him, and he with me.’ The invitation was not so much to aesthetic appreciation as to religious conversion. After engravings of the painting were taken and published in 1860, the image came to be extremely rapidly reproduced. Maas has found that, within a decade, nearly every home in the United Kingdom, as well as many throughout the colonies, possessed a copy of this most iconic and sentimental Christian image.³⁴

Christmas

Christmas, which had been banned entirely during the seventeenth-century Interregnum of 1649-1660 on the grounds that it was ‘popish’ and ‘unbiblical’, continued to be viewed with suspicion in the Puritan and Calvinist traditions, but steadily increased in importance among Anglicans in particular. Modern English Christmas celebrations – including mince pies, Christmas trees, carol singing, seasonal pantomimes, rich neo-medievalism and the exchanging of cards – date from the 1840s. The sudden fashion for Christmas trees is attributed to Queen Victoria’s consort, Prince Albert, who brought a number of German Christmas traditions, including the decorated Christmas tree, into the royal household in the 1840s. The first Christmas card is claimed by the Victoria and Albert museum to have been sent in 1843, the same year that Charles Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*. The sudden boom in special supplements and editions of serials and magazines such as *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* show that a Christmas market also developed rapidly from the 1840s. By 1848, when the *London Illustrated News* published a drawing of the royal family celebrating Christmas together around a decorated tree, the scene already looks like a modern English Christmas. By 1861, Mrs Beeton’s *Book of Household Management* included a recipe for ‘Christmas cake’ (though not yet for a steamed ‘Christmas’ plum pudding) and declared that ‘a Christmas dinner with the middle classes of this empire, would scarcely be a Christmas dinner without its turkey; and we can hardly imagine an object of greater envy than is presented by a respected portly pater-familias carving, at the season devoted to good cheer and genial charity, his own fat turkey, and carving it well.’

³⁴ Jeremy Maas, *Holman Hunt and the Light of the World* (Aldershot, 1984; 1987), pp. 73-76.

Continued hostility to Christmas from the Free Church and indifference on the part of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland meant that Christmas Day, which remained overshadowed by Hogmanay (New Year's) north of the border, did not become a public holiday in Scotland until as late as 1958. The Chapel of King's College, Cambridge first brought in its now internationally famous 'Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' in 1918; the service was first broadcast to the nation in 1928. The monarch's Christmas Day message was begun by King George V on 25 December 1932 and continued nearly every year thereafter. These radio and television rituals sealed the importance of Christmas by reminding the public of the monarch's continued headship of the Church of England and the British establishment's continued recognition of Britain as a Christian country.

Conclusion

Over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century, a series of government-led reforms gradually removed the monopoly over religious worship, education and welfare that had once been the preserve of the established churches of Great Britain. Catholic Emancipation and the opening up of state-funded institutions to dissenters, Nonconformists and Roman Catholics led not only to the disestablishment of the Irish, Welsh and Scottish churches, but also to the creation of a religious marketplace in which each denomination and sect sought to attract new adherents. The result was an atmosphere of fierce denominational competition that was simultaneously characterised by a lively sense of trans-denominational religious revival. This revival in turn gave the Victorians and Edwardians much of their characteristic air of piety, prudery, earnestness, public-spiritedness and missionary zeal.

By 1920, Anglican, Catholic and Nonconformist places of worship had come to express their differences of theological emphasis and spiritual mood outwardly as well as inwardly. This was not only a question of pamphlet wars among clergymen or sectarian folk prejudices among the laity, but also of concrete expressions of material difference that could be apprehended by the senses. Anglican churches typically advertised their claim to apostolic succession by building in fourteenth-century 'pointed' English Gothic, whereas 'Low' Church Presbyterian, Baptist and Unitarian chapels favoured plain styles that gave precedence to light, symmetry and the pulpit. Catholic churches, whether Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic, underlined their claim to belong to the universal Catholic Church by building in Romanesque, Byzantine, French or English Gothic style; by providing frequent communions, Benediction and recitation of the Rosary; by catering for confession; by decorating their interiors with images of the Sacred Heart, plaster-cast

statues of the saints, and perhaps a replica of the grotto at Lourdes; by covering church walls with the fourteen Stations of the Cross; and by routinely including holy water stoups, candles and incense. Denominational affiliation could also be expressed through food, whether by eating fish on Fridays or tucking into Hot Cross buns at Easter or plum puddings at Christmas. By the end of the 'long' nineteenth century, denominational differences in Britain were no longer simply expounded in words as written in pamphlets and treatises or shouted out on street corners. They were also felt, heard, smelled, seen and tasted.

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