'Popery Unmasked': Opposition to the Oxford Movement among Late Nineteenth-Century Dissenters

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism as it was frequently called,[1] emerged within the Church of England in the early 1830s out of concern over encroaching liberalism and State interference in ecclesiastical affairs (Erastianism). It aimed to restore a vision for Anglicanism rooted in antiquity and organically connected to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church—and thus not subject to parliamentary whims. It eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism and even witnessed some of its leading lights leave the Church of England for Roman Catholicism—the most prominent being John Henry Newman (1801–1890).

If the Oxford Movement's emergence was met with cautious sympathy among some Anglican Evangelicals who shared the Tractarians' concern over Erastianism,[2] any such sympathy had been long since spent by 1864.[3] Evangelicals—both inside and outside the Established Church—protested that migration to Rome was, in fact, the logical trajectory of the Oxford Movement.[4] By 1880, Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote in the *Churchman*, 'It is useless to deny that […] there is an organized conspiracy among us

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1 After a series of 90 tracts written from 1833–1841 to advance the movement's ideas. The tracts are available online here: http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts.

2 Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology, 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), p. 21. There was also plenty of early opposition from Evangelicals expressed in journals such as the *Record* and the *Christian Observer*. See Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part 1* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), pp. 73–74.

3 For a discussion of the early links and ultimate incompatibility of Evangelicalism and Tractarianism, as well as early evangelical responses see Kenneth J. Stewart, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism: Initial Encounters', *Themelios* 44.3 (December 2019), forthcoming.

4 By 1842, Merle d'Aubigné asserted 'Oxford leads to Rome,' and indeed, 'the Tiber flows in Oxford.' J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, *Geneva and Oxford: An Address* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1843), p. 22.

for Romanizing the Established Church of this country […] Dissenters see it and point the finger of scorn.'[5]

Although the Oxford Movement proper is often dated from 1833 to 1845,[6] many of its ideals gained refinement and momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century, morphing into what is now termed Anglo-Catholicism. While the Oxford Movement challenged some evangelical Nonconformists to have a more robust doctrine of the church, as well as increasing conscientiousness in regard to the aesthetics of their buildings,[7] the majority continued to sound the alarm against the movement, typically denouncing it as 'popery,' 'Romanism,' 'ritualism,' and 'Puseyism'[8]; although 'Tractarianism' was also still employed.

The story of Nonconformist vigilance towards the Tractarian movement received fresh impetus in 1864, the year which marked the publication of John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. The significance of this work is hard to minimize, since it not only tells the story of the Tractarian leader's defection to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, but it is the defence of his integrity through the entire process. Newman was repeatedly charged with nefarious deceit in leading many from the Church of England into the arms of Rome—and for secretly being Roman Catholic during his Tractarian years. The *Apologia* was his response to this charge, and particularly to Charles Kingsley, who spearheaded the attack.[9] But Kingsley's view of Newman's motives was commonly shared by Nonconformists.[10] In 1845, Henry Bulteel, the one-time Oxford don

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5 Reprinted in J. C. Ryle, *Light from Old Times* (1890; repr., Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1980), p. 454.

6 E.g. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1212, and R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years 1833–1845* (London: Macmillan, 1897).

7 See Dale A. Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 174–179; Dale A. Johnson, 'The Oxford Movement and English Nonconformity', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 59 (1990), 83–88.

8 After Edward B. Pusey (1800–1882), a prominent leader of the Oxford Movement and Regius Professor of Hebrew at Christ Church, Oxford.

9 On Kingsley see Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 105–34.

10 Such perspectives were emboldened and enlarged toward the close of the century by the appearance of Walter Walsh's *Secret History of the Oxford Movement* in 1897. See Martin Wellings, 'The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect: R.W. Church, J.H. Rigg, and Walter Walsh', in *The Church Retrospective*, ed. R.N. Swanson, *Studies in Church History*, 33 (1997), 511–15.

turned evangelical maverick,[11] wrote in satirical verse of the popish tendencies of the 'Tractarian ship.' Of Newman, Bulteel recorded these lines:

There's Newman wise and simple,
How saintly is his smile!
Alas! beneath each dimple
Lurk treachery and guile.

By him the light imparted
Makes Churchmen ready quite
Sound-headed and sound-hearted
To swear that wrong is right.[12]

Although Newman had converted to Roman Catholicism almost 20 years prior, the appearance of the *Apologia* in 1864, provided Nonconformists with another opportunity of warning the faithful about the dangers of popery within the Church of England.[13]

While there continued to be many who opposed Anglo-Catholicism in this later period, the present essay highlights two voices at opposite ends of Nonconformity: C. H. Spurgeon and John Nelson Darby. Spurgeon, the star of dissent, was commonly regarded as 'the greatest English-speaking preacher of the century.'[14] On the other hand, Darby was a pioneer of what has been called 'radical evangelicalism,'[15] since he was no happier with Nonconformity than he was with the Establishment, and branched off his idiosyncratic ecclesiology into exclusive Brethrenism. Indeed, Spurgeon himself thought Darby may have suffered from 'a touch of lunacy.'[16] Between these poles, we will briefly consider reactions from the Method-

11 For more on Bulteel and his secession from the Church of England in 1831 see Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 259–72. See also the article on Bulteel by Timothy Stunt in *ODNB* for his subsequent activity as a dissenter.

12 Henry Bulteel, *The Oxford Argo*, 1845. I am indebted to Timothy Stunt for pointing me to this poem, and for providing me with its text. The piece is noted in Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, p. 280 n173.

13 Newman's canonization in October 2019 demonstrates his ongoing significance to Roman Catholicism and to England.

14 David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 41.

15 Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

16 Ian Randall, '"Ye Men of Plymouth": C. H. Spurgeon and the Brethren', in *Witness in Many Lands: Leadership and Outreach among the Brethren*, ed. Tim Grass (Troon, UK: Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, 2013), p. 77.

ist, James Rigg, and the Scottish Free Church preacher, Alexander Whyte. These representative voices indicate that non-Anglican evangelicals of all stripes in the post-1864 period opposed the Oxford Movement as an abandonment of the gospel for the errors of Rome.[17] Of course, these were not the only errors such Victorian evangelicals sought to combat. Other battle fronts included Darwinism, higher criticism, and theological liberalism. But the threat the Oxford Movement posed in leading worshippers back to Rome reminded dissenters of their *raison d'être*: they were people of the gospel.

II. C. H. SPURGEON (1834–1892)

In 1899, the Baptist minister, John Clifford, identified 'the two most influential religious developments' of the nineteenth century as the Oxford Movement, or 'the Anglican Revival,' and 'the appearance and work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.'[18]

Spurgeon was born in 1834, the year following John Keble's Assize Sermon, the event Newman regarded as marking the birth of the Oxford Movement.[19] He enjoyed friendly relations with Evangelical Anglicans during his youth,[20] yet he also displayed a fiercely negative attitude toward Roman Catholicism. At the age of fifteen, a few months before his conversion, he composed an essay entitled, 'Antichrist and Her Brood; Or,

[17] Evangelical Anglicans furthered their opposition to the Anglo-Catholic party during this period by forming The Church Association in 1865. One of the aims of this body was to 'fight ritualism in the courts by means of legal action.' Nigel Scotland, 'Evangelicals, Anglicans and Ritualism in Victorian England', *Churchman* 111:3 (1997), 262.

[18] John Clifford, *God's Greater Britain: Letters and Addresses* (London: James Clarke, 1899), p. 158.

[19] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: D. Appleton, 1865), p. 83. Although see Peter B. Nockles, 'Histories and Anti-Histories', in *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles, and James Pereiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 607.

[20] Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 118.

Popery Unmasked.'[21] And as early as 1851, when he was 17, he preached against 'Puseyism.'[22]

The year 1864, however, marked an increasingly alarmist tone in Spurgeon's warnings against popery in the Church of England. On June 5, he preached a sermon entitled 'Baptismal Regeneration,' in which he stated: 'It is a most fearful fact, that in no age since the Reformation has Popery made such fearful strides in England as during the last few years.'[23] The sermon was primarily directed against the Church of England, whose Catechism and Book of Common Prayer, Spurgeon argued, clearly taught baptismal regeneration. He castigated Church of England ministers as frauds, who rejected the doctrine, yet pledged to uphold the formularies of the Anglican Church.

Yet Evangelical Churchmen had thought carefully about this issue in connection with the Gorham case in the late 1840s. High Churchmen and Tractarians opposed an appointment of the Reverend George Gorham for not affirming baptismal regeneration. In the end, however, Gorham was cleared and his position judged to be within the bounds of Anglican orthodoxy. Thus William Goode, Dean of Ripon, chided Spurgeon for his apparent ignorance of the Gorham case. But Spurgeon was not intimidated. In his sermon, 'Thus Saith the Lord,'[24] Spurgeon replied directly to Goode: 'Gorham case, say you; I care nothing for your Gorham case, I want a 'Thus saith the Lord,' warranting you to swear to what you know to be false and dangerous.'[25]

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21 *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), pp. 57–66. See also Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), pp. 24–25 and Geoffrey Chang, 'Spurgeon's Use of Luther against the Oxford Movement', *Themelios* 43:1 (2018), 46–47.

22 'Salvation in God Only', in Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 1, ed. Christian George (Nashville: B&H, 2016), pp. 191, 193. This point is highlighted in Chang, 'Spurgeon's Use of Luther against the Oxford Movement', 46 n10.

23 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Baptismal Regeneration', in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 10, https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/baptismal-regeneration#flipbook, accessed November 9, 2018.

24 September 25, 1864. https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/thus-saith-the-lord#flipbook.

25 For helpful summaries of the Gorham controversy see Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, pp. 342–55, Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, pp. 250–71, and James C. Whisenant, *A Fragile Unity: Anti-Ritualism and the Division of Anglican Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 20–23. That Evangelical Anglicans differed in their understanding of baptism is highlighted in Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context:*

Part of Spurgeon's design in the 'Baptismal Regeneration' sermon was to sound the alarm against Puseyism. If the primary blame for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration lay at the feet of the Church of England formularies, the advance of popery in England was sped along by the Oxford Movement. The preacher declared, 'Away from all the tag-rags, wax candles, and millinery of Puseyism! away from all the gorgeous pomp of Popery! away from the fonts of Church-of-Englandism! we bid you turn your eyes to that naked cross, where hangs as a bleeding man the Son of God.'[26]

The sermon sparked no small controversy.[27] With the pamphlets, articles, and sermons that were issued in response, Spurgeon compiled five large volumes.[28] He preached a number of subsequent sermons on related themes, including one three weeks later entitled 'Let Us Go Forth.' This was a call for believers to abandon the Church of England. He declared, 'Often have I read works in which the Puseyites call the Church of Rome their sister Church; well, if it be so, let the two harlots make a league together, but let good and honest men come out of both apostate Churches.'[29]

For Spurgeon, what was ultimately at stake in the controversy was justification by faith or evangelical conversion, which alone brought true spiritual life. As Peter Morden explains, 'The Roman Catholic and Tractarian approaches to baptism […] blurred this fundamental truth, replacing it with "ceremony" and "superstition."'[30]

In 1866, in an article entitled 'The Holy War of the Present Hour,'[31] Spurgeon proposed a strategy for undermining the influence of Tractari-

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Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760–1857 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 228–35.

26 Spurgeon, 'Baptismal Regeneration'.

27 Tim Grass and Ian Randall, 'C. H. Spurgeon on the Sacraments', in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 64–67.

28 Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 129 n10.

29 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Let Us God Forth', in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 10, preached June 26, 1864, https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/let-us-go-forth#flipbook, accessed November 9, 2018.

30 Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, p. 92.

31 C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Holy War of the Present Hour', *The Sword and the Trowel* (August 1866), 339–45. Chang calculates that Spurgeon published 22 articles against the Oxford Movement and Roman Catholicism in the five years following 1864. Chang, 'Spurgeon's Use of Luther against the Oxford Movement', 51.

anism. He argued that the 'Tractarian party' was by far the most powerful in the Church of England, and was on the rise. He wrote,

> Those who remember the Puseyism of ten years ago will have observed the tremendous strides with which it has advanced, and will have been equally struck with the development which it has undergone […]. No longer can we say that Puseyism is Romanism disguised; it has removed the mask, and is now openly and avowedly what it has always been—ritualism, sacramentarianism, priestcraft, Antichrist.[32]

To Spurgeon, this was a call to spiritual arms. 'Let a crusade against Puseyism and all other error be proclaimed,' he urged, 'and let all faithful souls enlist in the great war.'[33] A critical element of his strategy was to take a page out of Tractarian playbook and beat them at their own game. He outlined his plan as follows:

> We would urge the propriety of a very large distribution of religious literature bearing upon the Puseyite controversy...Tractarianism owed its origin to tracts, as its name implies; why may not its downfall come from the same means, if well used? If several millions of copies of forcible, Scriptural testimonies could be scattered over the land, the results might far exceed all expectation. Of course, controversy would arise out of such a distribution; but this is most desirable, since it is only error which could suffer by the question being everywhere discussed. We should like to see the country flooded, and even the walls placarded with bold exposures of error and plain expositions of truth.[34]

His concluded with a plea for action:

> If […] every man had a thousand tongues, every one should cry out against the Anglican Antichrist. No greater plague can break forth among our people than the plague of Puseyism! If there be any human means unused by which the flood of Popery may be stemmed, let us use it, and meanwhile, with heart and soul let us approach the throne of grace, and cry unto the Lord to maintain his own truth, and put his enemies to confusion.[35]

Some took the plea to heart, and came forward to contribute to such a work. The result was the establishment of the Colportage Association. Its mission was 'to extend the circulation of the Scriptures, and to increase

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32 Spurgeon, 'The Holy War of the Present Hour', 340.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 343.
35 Ibid., 345.

the diffusion of sound religious literature, in order to counteract the evils arising from the perusal of works of a decidedly Romish tendency.'[36]

Spurgeon wrote a number of tracts for this effort, with titles such as: 'Anglican Ministers in Papists' Clothing' (Tract 9); 'Against Romish Anglicanism' (Tract 16); and 'The Ritualist Priest and the Ass' (Tract 32).[37] Spurgeon's biting rhetoric was unrestrained in these pieces. He wrote, for example, in Tract 30, 'The distinction between the Popery of Rome and the Popery of Oxford is only the difference between prussic acid and arsenic: they are both equally deadly, and are equally to be abhorred.'[38] He waxed sarcastic in responding to the notion that the Church of England was 'the great bulwark of Protestantism.' 'We will believe it when we believe wolves to be the guardians of sheepfolds, felons to be the defenders of property, and fallen angels to be the bodyguard of heaven — and not till then.'[39]

Spurgeon believed the problem lay, not simply in the influence of Puseyism, but in the principle of establishment itself. As a dissenter, he was convinced that if the church was freed from the state, 'Then those hundreds of godly men who now remain in communion with Romanisers will form themselves into a truly Protestant church, and will in brotherly union with the other free churches form the true bulwark of Protestantism.'[40] He believed that such a move would purge error and revive authentic gospel spirituality. Spurgeon's opposition to the Oxford Movement – or what it had evolved into by the latter half of the nineteenth century – was bold, principled, and unrelenting because he believed the gospel itself was at stake.

III. JOHN NELSON DARBY (1800–1882)

We turn now from Spurgeon to a voice at the other end of the spectrum of Nonconformity, John Nelson Darby. The inclusion of Darby perhaps needs less of an *apologia* than some might assume. In 1970, Ernest Sandeen wrote, 'John Nelson Darby deserves better treatment from historians

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36 C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Volume 2: The Full Harvest, 1860–1892* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 460.

37 For these and other 'Sword and Trowel Tracts', see http://archive.spurgeon.org/sw&tr.php. Accessed November 8, 2018.

38 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Three Clergymen of the Church of England', https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/tract30.php. Accessed November 8, 2018. It also appeared in the April 1868 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel* under the title 'The Three Priests.'

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

than he has received either from those who have praised him or those who have reviled him. The assessment of his career has not been objectively written or the scope of his influence adequately appreciated.'[41] More recently, Donald Akenson, has identified Darby as the fourth most influential figure in the formation of present-day Protestantism, behind only Luther, Calvin, and Wesley.[42] While this claim may sound hyperbolic, Akenson does not mean it to be. He is engaged in a three volume project, chronicling the transatlantic development of apocalyptic millennialism, and Darby is the central character.[43]

Ordained a priest in the Church of Ireland in 1826, Darby was, like many Irish Anglican evangelicals, 'an exact churchman emphasizing sacramental grace.'[44] A riding accident and an extended convalescence in 1827, however, caused him to rethink his ecclesiastical convictions. 'During my solitude,' Darby testified, 'much exercise of soul had the effect of causing the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me.'[45] He thus gained a new sense of freedom and peace, for by submitting to the sole authority of Scripture there arose in his mind and heart a new awareness of the love of Christ and his being united to him.[46] This proved transformational to Darby's doctrine and practice, and he shortly thereafter began breaking bread with a small group of believers, who would form the nucleus of what would become the Brethren movement.

Over the next several years, Darby developed his doctrine of the 'ruin of the church,' which argued that the institutional Church was utterly corrupted. The visible Church, with its ecclesiastical, denominational, and clerical structures had moved so far beyond God's original principles that the church was in ruins and irreparable.[47] Darby believed 'the church fell

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41 Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (1970; repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 31.

42 Donald Harman Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time: Irish Evangelicals in the Age of Daniel O'Connell* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), p. 3.

43 Volume one: Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time; volume two: Donald Harman Akenson, Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). The third volume is forthcoming.

44 *BDEB*, 290.

45 J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.* (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n.d.), 3:298.

46 Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006), p. 18.

47 Mathew Austin Clarke, 'A Critical Examination of the Ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby' (University of Gloucestershire, PhD thesis, 2009), pp. 107–15.

into apostasy as it became entangled with, and ultimately indistinguishable from, the world around it.'[48] The true Church was composed of those united to Christ through faith, whose calling now was to withdraw from corrupt Christendom and gather in small companies solely to the name of Christ.

What makes Darby even more intriguing is the fact that the Brethren movement he helped pioneer arose around the same time as the Oxford Movement. Timothy Stunt has argued that the Oxford Movement and the Brethren movement represent two of the most important reactions to the threats of that period—Erastian interference into church affairs on the one hand, and liberal rationalism undermining the authority of Scripture on the other. Both movements might thus be understood as 'a search for authority within the Church.'[49]

In 1854, Darby penned a lengthy essay entitled 'Remarks on Puseyism.' In it he responded to Robert Isaac Wilberforce's *Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, challenging Wilberforce's notion that the Eucharist is the continuation of the incarnation. 'This confusion,' Darby asserted, 'is the essence of the dark apostasy which passes by the name of Puseyism.'[50]

Darby's most sustained response came in his 'Analysis of Dr. Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.' This piece appeared in 1866 and runs over a hundred pages in length.[51]

While Darby's ecclesiastical position places him among the lowest of low church advocates, he nevertheless, expressed some sympathy with Newman's attraction to Rome. He confessed that while still a clergyman in the Irish Church, he disowned the name of Protestantism. Like Newman, he was looking for the true church. In this restless state of mind, Darby admits that he 'thought much of Rome, and its professed sanctity, and catholicity, and antiquity.'[52] Protestantism did not satisfy his desire for 'reverend antiquity,' and thus he claimed, 'I was really much in

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48 Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, 95–96.

49 T. C. F. Stunt, 'Two Nineteenth-Century Movements', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 37:4 (October 1965), 221. Cf. John Munsey Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740–1982* (London: Epworth, 1985), p. 149. It is also worth noting that Darby, for a time, had a significant influence on J. H. Newman's brother, Francis. See Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, pp. 206–7.

50 J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* [*CW*] (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n.d.), 15:262.

51 J. N. Darby, 'Analysis of Dr. Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: With a Glance at the History of Popes, Councils, and the Church', *CW*, 18:143–248.

52 Ibid., 18:146.

Dr. Newman's state of mind.'[53] He recounts his regular fasting, and taking the sacrament from his clergyman. He claimed to have fully upheld the doctrine of apostolic succession and firmly rejected union of church and state.

But Darby's march to Rome was halted and reversed by his study of the 9th and 10th chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He wrote, 'I could not for priesthood, which I believed in, practically give up our great High Priest and His work. What delivered me from this whole system was the truth. The word of God had its own, its divine authority over my soul, and maintained it through grace.'[54]

Although Darby rejected the Roman Church, he did not fully embrace Protestantism per se. Protestantism addressed errors of doctrine and practice in Roman Catholicism, but with its national churches, it had failed to restore 'the church to purity.' Darby concluded Protestantism 'did not see […] the true doctrine of the church, any more than Dr. Newman.'[55] His subsequent Brethrenism was his attempt to flesh out his own doctrine of the church.

In Darby's evaluation, a primary explanation for Newman's position—and by extension, the charm of Anglo-Catholicism—was aesthetics. He wrote, 'The secret of the course of Dr. Newman's mind is this—it is sensuous; and so is Romanism.'[56] A few pages later, he added: '[Romanism] is a sensuous religion, fills the imagination with gorgeous ceremonies, noble buildings, fine music, stately processions. It feeds it with legends and the poetry of antiquity; but it gives no holy peace to the conscience.'[57] Newman himself had written at the time of the publication of Tract 90, 'The Church of Rome […] alone […] has given free scope to the feelings of awe, mystery, tenderness, reverence, devotedness, and other feelings which may be especially called Catholic.'[58]

The charge of sensuosity was not unique to Darby. Evangelicals frequently criticized Anglo-Catholicism along these lines. Bishop J. C. Ryle, for example, in an essay on 'Worship,' argued that the practices of Romanism 'may be very attractive to the eye, and ear, and the sensual part

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 156–7.

55 Ibid., 146.

56 Ibid., 145.

57 Ibid., 152. Darby cites the passage where Newman said of the Catholic Church, 'I looked at her;—at her rites, her ceremonial, and her precepts; and I said, "This *is* a religion."' Wilfrid Ward, ed., *Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua: The Two Versions of 1864 & 1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 394. This passage was removed in the 1865 edition.

58 Ward, *Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p. 262.

of our nature. But it has one fatal defect about it: it cannot be defended and maintained by plain texts of Scripture. Sacramentalism, Ceremonialism, Sacrificialism, will never be found in Bibles fairly read and honestly interpreted.'[59] With this statement, Darby, and many dissenters, would entirely be one.[60]

But Darby's criticism was not merely about aesthetics. Christianity itself was at stake. The essence of true Christianity is in the believer's direct access to God. Through the work of Christ, the veil in the temple was opened, and thus relationship and fellowship with God was established. The cleansing of one's conscience, forgiveness of sins, and new life in Christ flows directly to the believer, who is encouraged to boldly enter the presence of God. By contrast, 'Romanism,' Darby argued, 'has closed the veil again. The faithful are not reconciled to God, they cannot go into the holiest […] between them and God, they have a priesthood and saints, and the Virgin Mary.'[61]

What Darby found particularly alarming in Newman's *Apologia* was an absence of Christ, and of the Word of God. As to Christ, there was no question of Newman's Christological orthodoxy, but there was no sense of resting in him for peace of soul; no sense of personally possessing Christ 'as the foundation of his soul.'[62] As to Scripture, Darby noticed that in Newman's quest for the proper notion of the Church, there was recourse to the great Anglican divines, and there was much made of the Fathers, but there was no serious engagement with Scripture. In Darby's words,

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59 John Charles Ryle, *Knots Untied: Being Plain Statement on Disputed Points in Religion from the Standpoint of an Evangelical Churchman*, rev. edn (London: Charles Murray, 1898), p. 355. Elsewhere Ryle asserted, 'There is a natural proneness and tendency in us all to give God a sensual, carnal worship, and not that which is commanded in His Word' (Ibid., 490). On another occasion, he complained that the 'Ritualistic party in the Church of England […] has gradually familiarized people with every distinctive doctrine and practice of Romanism […] a histrionic, sensuous, showy style of public worship.' *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 299.

60 Chadwick described the difference between the old-fashioned high churchmen and the Oxford men as 'not so much a difference in doctrine,' but 'primarily a difference of atmosphere, a concern for the evocative and the reverent, a sense of the whispering beauty and truth of divinity as its presence surrounded the soul.' Owen Chadwick, ed., *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), p. 28.

61 Darby, 'Analysis', p. 153.

62 Ibid., 160. For more on Darby's soteriology see Mark R. Stevenson, *The Doctrines of Grace in an Unexpected Place: Calvinistic Soteriology in Nineteenth-Century Brethren Thought* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017).

Newman 'never inquired for God's truth on God's authority,' and therefore there was 'no divine ground of faith.'[63]

While there was much more to Darby's response, these two points—the absence of personal faith in Christ, and the absence of the sole authority of Scripture—capture the heart of his critique of Newman, and by extension, the Oxford Movement.

IV. JAMES HARRISON RIGG (1821–1909)

In the closing decade of the nineteenth century, further Nonconformist publications offered assessments of the Oxford Movement. Martin Wellings has called this 'the period of Tractarian reminiscence and biography, as the leading figures of the Oxford Movement reached the end of their lives.'[64]

One out-spoken critic was the Wesleyan Methodist, James Harrison Rigg, whose *Oxford High Anglicanism and its Chief Leaders* appeared in 1895.[65] Rigg focused significant attention on the period following Newman's secession in 1845, and thus Edward Pusey featured prominently. Although Rigg claimed not to be 'a bitter Protestant,' or 'a narrow Evangelical,'[66] he did not hold back in his criticisms of the movement's theology and practice. Like other Nonconformists he decried the Romeward bent of the Tractarians. Rigg declared, 'Puseyism is essentially Popery.'[67] This, in his judgment, was 'the true Protestant view.'[68]

For Rigg, the two foundational errors of Puseyism were 'its sacramental perversions, whereby the holy seals of the Christian faith are turned into superstitions.' And secondly, 'its dehumanising doctrine of the confessional.'[69] Once these errors were embraced, Rigg asserted, 'there is no tenet, either of Tridentine or of modern Popery, which may not be received.'[70]

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63 Darby, 'Analysis', pp. 163–4.

64 Wellings, 'The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect', 501.

65 See the discussion of Rigg in Nockles, 'Histories and Anti-Histories', pp. 615–16. Dale Johnson has argued that the Oxford Movement forced Methodism to fully identify as Nonconformists. Johnson, 'The Oxford Movement and English Nonconformity,' pp. 80–83.

66 James H. Rigg, *Oxford High Anglicanism and Its Chief Leaders* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1895), p. vi.

67 Ibid., 90, 298.

68 Ibid., 90.

69 Again these statements are found in two places, pages 90 and 298.

70 Ibid.

His concern was primarily soteriological; the gospel had been not only obscured, but lost in Tractarianism. Rigg acknowledged that Pusey was a stirring preacher, but he did not direct sinners to Christ as Saviour. The characteristic effect of Pusey's preaching was to drive his hearers 'to the priest and the confessional.'[71] He took particular exception to Pusey's contention that 'Wesleyanism substituted its doctrine of 'present salvation' for the comfort through the ordinance of confession and absolution.' To this Rigg responded by turning Pusey's statement on its head: 'Puseyism substitutes for the blessed doctrine of a present and conscious salvation, through "repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," such comfort as may be obtained from confession to a human priest, and absolution pronounced by his lips.'[72] Rigg would conclude that Pusey was essentially one with the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification.[73]

As Wellings has observed, Rigg sought to demonstrate that the leaders of the Oxford Movement were both theologically and intellectually defective, as well as morally suspect. The moral charge was that of dishonesty: the Tractarians were advancing Roman Catholic teaching within the Church of England.[74] Newman, of course, famously denied the charge of dishonesty, and the *Apologia* convinced Rigg that Newman was not 'a consciously dishonest man.' In fact, he believed Newman had maintained his moral integrity. The problem, as Rigg saw it, was that Newman 'was a man whose over-subtlety blinded him. He possessed a highly-trained faculty of mental obliquity […] He had acquired the power of duping himself.'[75] Darby's criticism that Newman's mind was drawn by aesthetics was also part of Rigg's assessment. He charged that for Newman, it was feelings that determined the creed; logic was an afterthought employed to defend his conclusions.[76]

On the whole then, Rigg represents not only the perspective of a Wesleyan Methodist, but what was typical of the Nonconformist evangelical—salvation in Christ alone was not merely obscured by the Oxford Movement, it was replaced in favour of popery. Wellings concludes, 'The

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71 Ibid., 233.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 309.

74 Wellings, 'The Oxford Movement in in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect', 510.

75 Rigg, *Oxford High Anglicanism*, p. 310.

76 Ibid., 155. He went further and charged that 'Newman's was […] a characteristically feminine mind, poetic, impressible, receptive, and reproductive, rather than original and commanding; and with the feminine mind was joined a feminine temperament.'

suggestion that Anglo-Catholicism challenged reason and conscience placed Rigg in the mainstream of late nineteenth-century Protestant polemic.'[77]

V. ALEXANDER WHYTE (1836–1921)

The predominately negative assessment of the Oxford Movement by dissenters must be balanced by occasional voices of appreciation.[78] Perhaps the most notable example here is Alexander Whyte. One of the outstanding evangelical preachers of the Scottish Free Church—and thus, not a nonconformist in the English sense[79]—Whyte has been described as 'the last of the Puritans.'[80] And yet he 'read and reread all the *Tracts for the Times*,' not as a critic, but as an admirer, particularly of Newman, with whom he maintained a correspondence.[81] Gordon Rupp could say, 'In Alexander Whyte, Newman had, in Kierkegaard's phrase, a lover.'[82] In 1901, Whyte published a volume entitled *Newman: An Appreciation*, in which he declared, 'I live by admiration, hope, and love, and Newman has always inspired me with all these feelings toward himself and toward many of his works.'[83] A portrait of Newman 'hung in a place of honour in Whyte's study.'[84] Whyte's admiration was exceptional, but so also was his ecumenical spirit, which was far broader than most evangelicals. Michael Haykin suggests that Whyte looked to other traditions as a 'means of

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77 Wellings, 'The Oxford Movement in in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect', 510–11.

78 Johnson seeks to demonstrate the influence of the Oxford Movement on Nonconformists in a variety of ways. Yet he recognizes the overall impact was relatively modest. For example, 'George S. Reaney, who left Congregational ministry for Anglicanism in 1890, thought that 'high church' views were held by very few ministers and scarcely any lay people.' Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity*, p. 178.

79 *DSCHT*, s.v. 'Nonconformity.' As a Scottish Presbyterian, Whyte provides another important non-Anglican evangelical perspective.

80 E.g. *DSCHT*, p. 870 and *NIDCC*, p. 1045.

81 Whyte printed some of the letters he received from Newman as an appendix in Alexander Whyte, *Newman: An Appreciation in Two Lectures* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), 249–54. Whyte's wife, Jane, also corresponded with Cardinal Newman. See G. F. Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte* D.D., 7th edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), pp. 241–3.

82 Gordon Rupp, *Just Men: Historical Pieces* (London: Epworth, 1977), p. 141.

83 Whyte, *Newman: An Appreciation*, 11. Cf. the inclusion of the Newman essay in Alexander Whyte, Thirteen Appreciations (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), pp. 283–359.

84 Rupp, *Just Men*, 142; Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, pp. 241–2.

deepening his Reformed faith and challenging his soul to be a more devoted follower of Christ.'[85] Others view Whyte's ecumenism as a shocking 'lack of discernment.'[86]

Despite his admiration, Whyte could not ignore Newman's doctrinal defects and, indeed, spoke out against them. He lamented, not that Newman left the Church of England for the Church of Rome, but that he abandoned 'the Evangelical faith, than which, properly speaking, there is no other faith.' Whyte confessed, 'Paul's indignant language to the Galatian Church alone expresses my sad thoughts over Newman's declension.'[87] Whyte believed Newman should have renounced the slurs he wrote against Luther, Calvin, and the Anglican Reformers, 'whose only offence against Newman and his sectarian and intolerant school had been that they were determined to preach no other gospel than the gospel of a sinner's free justification before God by faith on the Son of God, and on Him and His work alone.'[88]

In an assessment of Newman's published sermons, Whyte wrote:

> Looked at as pure literature, Newman's St. Mary's sermons are not far from absolute perfection; but looked at as pulpit work, as preaching the Gospel, they are full of the most serious, and even fatal, defects […] They lack the one all-essential element of all true preaching—the message to sinful man concerning the free grace of God.[89]

Whyte conceded, 'After all is said in praise of these extraordinary sermons, this remains, that Newman's constant doctrine is that doctrine which the Apostle discarded with anathemas—salvation by works.'[90] Although it pained him to say it, Whyte had to conclude that Newman's preaching 'never once touches the true core, and real and innermost essence, of the Gospel.'

CONCLUSION

In the wake of Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), along with the perceived growth of Anglo-Catholicism within the Established Church,

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85 Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *A Consuming Fire: The Piety of Alexander Whyte* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), p. 7.

86 William Macleod, 'Alexander Whyte: Lessons to Learn', *Free Church Witness* (October 2013), p. 5.

87 Whyte, *Newman: An Appreciation*, p. 57.

88 Ibid., 67.

89 Ibid., 90–92.

90 Ibid., 94.

dissenters of all stripes felt duty-bound to expose the dangers of 'popery,' which they believed were clearly displayed in the Oxford Movement. Whether the Baptist Spurgeon, the Plymouth Brother Darby, the Methodist Rigg, or the Free Church Presbyterian Whyte, the concern was the same: in leading people in a Rome-ward direction, the Oxford Movement led them away from the gospel itself. Too much was at stake to keep silent, not least, the authority of Scripture, the sufficiency of the atoning work of Christ—together with his high priestly ministry, and justification by faith alone as the only sure means of salvation and peace with God.

Not surprisingly then, it was the Tractarian doctrine of justification, alongside its sacramentalism, ritualism, and priesthood, that rallied many late nineteenth-century dissenters to express again their commitment to the evangel and to the core doctrines of the Reformation.