

The English Catholic Reaction to the Tractarian Movement

by R.J. SCHIEFEN

In spite of the masses of books, articles, and pamphlets that have been written to discuss the Oxford Movement and its influence, scholars, for various reasons, persist in adding to the literature on the subject. The Tractarians and their devotees influenced Anglicanism profoundly, of course, and the results of their efforts are evident still. Moreover, interest in Victorian church history has been stimulated by the abundance of primary source materials now available. Finally, the ecumenical spirit of our own era was prefigured in the nineteenth century, an added practical incentive for those of us who believe that the past has much to offer us in shaping the present and the future.

Roman Catholics as well as Anglicans have been prolific in writing about the Oxford Movement, sometimes, however, assigning it a causality that is not entirely warranted. Denis Gwynn, for example, once described the commencement of the *Tracts for the Times* and concluded that the movement with which they were identified resulted “in the conversion to Catholicism of their principal writers.”¹ In fact, of the almost twenty contributors to the *Tracts*, the only converts were John Henry Newman and Henry Edward Manning, and the latter did no more than co-author Tract LXXVIII. Gwynn, in a later work, acknowledged that the Oxford Movement “was for years treated with exaggerated importance as the main factor in the rapid Catholic Revival which led to the restoration of the English hierarchy, with Cardinal Wiseman as the first Archbishop of Westminster, in 1850.”² In an Introduction to the same volume, Father S.J. Gosling wrote:

Most people think of the Catholic Revival as though it originated with the Oxford Movement; they have been blinded by the brilliant light that surrounds such names as Newman, Ward, Manning, with Wiseman, fresh from Rome, as a sort of lodestar. But in fact the Church which the Oxford

¹ Denis GWYNN, *A Hundred Years of Catholic Emancipation, 1829--1929*. (London, 1929), 26.

² Denis GWYNN, *Lord Shrewsbury, Pugin and the Catholic Revival*. (Westminster, Md., 1946), ix-x.

men joined was already a vigorous and independent body before they brought to it the added lustre of academic distinction.³

While I agree with Gosling that it would be a mistake to overemphasise the influence of the Oxford Movement in shaping nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism, there is no denying the fact that the revival which occurred in continental Catholicism in the years following Waterloo was slow in making an impact in England. This is not surprising, surely. There were few Catholics in England who were qualified or who had the leisure to devote themselves to literary or artistic pursuits. Even after Emancipation in 1829, they still suffered from legal and social disabilities, moreover, and few of them were in a position to influence their fellow-countrymen. English Catholics were governed from Rome as a mission territory through vicars apostolic (of episcopal rank) who were responsible directly to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. There were four such vicars until 1840, when further divisions were made and four new vicariates added. In 1850, a Roman Catholic hierarchy was established with Cardinal Wiseman as the first Archbishop of Westminster.

There had been scattered conversions to Roman Catholicism prior to the Oxford Movement, but there is no doubt that the increasing number of Catholics resulted more from Irish immigration than from Catholic interest among Anglicans. Few Catholics were in a position to know or to care about a series of tracts written by a small band of Oxonians; fewer still were those who saw any positive significance for them in the Oxford Movement, and only a tiny proportion was able to respond positively. Interest increased in the 1840's with some notable conversions. Most of this paper, then, will deal with exceptions to the rule, although I shall attempt to provide something of the broader picture as well.

No Roman Catholic did more to call attention to the possibilities of the Tractarian Movement than Nicholas Wiseman (1802-65). Born in Seville and educated at Ushaw College, Durham and the English College, Rome, Wiseman was brilliant, perceptive, and impulsive. He was Rector of the English College in 1833 when the first tract appeared and had already earned an international reputation for his abilities and scholarly achievement. Wiseman later claimed that it was a visit to Rome by John Henry Newman and Richard Hurrell Froude in 1833 that inspired his interest in what seemed to be stirring at Oxford.⁴ He was already in contact with leaders of the

³ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

⁴ Nicholas WISEMAN, *Essays on Various Subjects* (3 vols.; London, 1853), II, vi-vii; pp.93-4.

Catholic revival in Europe. As Rector of the college, he had become familiar with Lamennais, Lacordaire, and Montalembert in 1831 when the famous “pilgrims” sought the approbation of the Holy Father for their endeavours in France. He was also acquainted with German scholars, and later took to heart the observation of Ignaz von Döllinger on English Catholicism:

There seems now to be a sort of literary apathy and inactivity on the side of English Catholics, and yet you are continually attacked, and, if I mistake not, your numerous adversaries take too much advantage of your silence. Your Milners, Butlers, and others are gone, without having left successors.⁵

Wiseman needed no convincing in this regard.

The future cardinal had been approached some years earlier by Bishop Peter Augustine Baines of the Western District who had sunk all of the funds of his district into Prior Park, near Bath, in the hope of turning it into a seminary and even a Catholic university. Baines had made overtures to Wiseman to come to England as his coadjutor bishop and president of the institution. The plans fell through for a number of reasons, and in 1834 Wiseman wrote:

His object is manifestly to have me at the head of Prior Park, *when a university* and I own that what induced me to accede to his proposal [of a bishopric] was the same motive. I have so long deplored, as you know, the defects of our education, and the want of a literary centre and institution, I have so long wished for a good journal, and a power to lead the Catholic mind, which necessarily requires station, that I felt I was called in duty to make a sacrifice of worldly comfort, peace and interest, and accept a situation, the *only one* which would have enabled me to carry my views into execution.⁶

The Holy See refused the request both because of the future cardinal’s youth

⁵ Döllinger to Wiseman, November 17, 1835, Ushaw College Archives, Wiseman Correspondance, #229 and quoted in full in Wilfrid WARD, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman* (2 vols.; London, 1897), I, pp. 139-41.

⁶ Wiseman to Tandy, August 6, 1834, Ushaw College Archives, Wiseman Correspondance, #793.

and because of some controversial matters in which Baines was involved.⁷ Moreover, Thomas Penswick, Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District and theoretically Wiseman's Bishop, opposed the plan altogether.⁸ Nevertheless Wiseman travelled to England in the summer of 1835 and remained for the greater part of a year. The trip set him on the road that brought him to England permanently in 1840 as Coadjutor to Bishop Thomas Walsh of the Central District (newly created when the old Midland District was divided) where Wiseman also served as President of Oscott College, Birmingham. As soon as Walsh had discovered that Wiseman would not be used at Prior Park, he sought his services for the Midland District. Bernard Ward's contention that Walsh "had not specially wanted Dr. Wiseman for his Coadjutor" makes no sense at all in view of the available correspondence from Walsh to the contrary.⁹ Among the principal reasons which Walsh offered consistently for seeking Wiseman's assistance was the work that the younger man might do among the Oxford divines. Oxford was in Walsh's district. In 1840 he wrote to Monsignor Charles Acton, the future cardinal and an important figure in Rome:

You have, my dear Monsignor Acton, heard of the talented zealous Oxford divines whose influence seems to be daily increasing & who in so many points, seem to be approaching towards the Catholic religion, though at the present moment they are so decidedly hostile to it. It requires men of ability & extensive learning to meet these learned & acute ecclesiastics. Dr. Wiseman is respected by them & is the person most qualified to meet them & to train others for the same purpose. From Oscott College he would derive peculiar advantages for that object.¹⁰

⁷ For an account of Bishop Baines and his battles, see J.S. ROCHE, *A History of Prior Park and Its Founder Bishop Baines* (London, 1931), pp. 30-184.

⁸ Penswick to Bramston, December 21, 1834 and Penswick to Griffiths, April 13, 1835, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, A.76 and A.77.

⁹ Bernard WARD, *The Sequel to Catholic Emancipation, 1830-1850* (2 vols.; London, 1915), II, 4. For some of the letters contradicting this strange assertion, see also to Wiseman, May 6, May 27, June 1, July 17, December 12, 1836; March 1, 1837; July 17, 1838; January 27, 1839; February 5, 1840, Rome, English College Archives, 70:4-6. Also see Walsh to Lord Shrewsbury, September 27, 1839, Ushaw College Archives, W.S., 10.

¹⁰ Walsh to Acton, February 10, 1840, Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, III, 338.

Wiseman himself was desperately anxious to be in England for the same reason. During his long visit in 1835-1836, he had joined Michael Quin and Daniel O'Connell in realising one of his dreams, the establishment of a Catholic journal, the *Dublin Review*, stating that his chief motive for cooperating in the enterprise was "his keen interest in the Oxford Movement and the importance of dealing with it fully in the Review."¹¹ Very shortly after Wiseman had arrived in England as a bishop, it was rumored that he would be sent to the North to replace the man assigned to that vicariate. Wiseman wrote in dismay to Monsignor Acton: "The controversy with the Puseyites at Oxford has been entirely thrown into my hands," and he warned: "If I be removed to the North, I must necessarily quit the field, at any rate, my long nourished hopes of being able by personal intercourse to win some of those learned men must be completely abandoned."¹² He was not exaggerating his own influence. His articles in the *Dublin Review* had attracted the attention of the Tractarians because of both their erudition and their charitable tone. Wilfrid Ward wrote on these articles:

Wiseman may claim to have been among the first effectually to remind Englishmen in our own day of that historical significance of the Catholic Church which so much impressed Macaulay, which affected permanently such a man as Comte, and kindled the historical enthusiasm of a De Maistre, a Görres, and a Frederick Schlegel.¹³

Something of the tone of Wiseman's writings may be seen from the following passage, written in 1841:

I have... stated what would seem to be our first duty; to offer cheerfully and honestly every explanation in our power, and point out where our real doctrines are mistaken, where they are confounded with mere permissive practices, and where they may be liable to abuse. The sooner a clear and distinct understanding can be come to upon these matters, whether by personal conference, or by writing, the better for the cause.

¹¹ W. WARD, *op. cit.*, I, 249.

¹² Wiseman to Acton, September 2, 1840, Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, III, p. 424. For further evidence of Wiseman's ambition in this regard, see *Ibid.*, pp. 415-20.

¹³ W. WARD, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 330-1. These articles have been published together in Nicholas WISEMAN, *Essays on Various Subjects*, II.

He added: "A second duty seems likewise suggested by what has been already said, — that of selfimprovement, and, where necessary, selfreformation."¹⁴

There were other Englishmen who saw the Tractarian Movement as significant for the future of the Catholic Church in England. Among those whose initial reaction and continuing interest were noteworthy, Ambrose Phillipps (1809-1878) was the most outstanding. Phillipps became a Catholic at school when he was fifteen. He went to Trinity College, Cambridge, but left after two years due to ill health. Devoting himself untiringly to the restoration of the Catholic Church in England, Phillipps was one of the enthusiastic founders of the Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom in 1857 from which Catholics were told to withdraw in 1865. In 1862, upon the death of his father, Phillipps added De Lisle to his name.

Phillipps made early contact with the leading Tractarians as well as with those few Roman Catholics who were similarly excited by the movement. Among the latter, particular mention must be made of George Spencer (1799-1864), youngest son of the Earl of Spencer. After studying at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Spencer took orders in the Church of England but became a Catholic in 1830. He was a professor at Oscott when Wiseman arrived there, but in 1847 Spencer joined the Passionists, taking the name of Ignatius.

Both Phillipps and Spencer were promoters of the cause of Christian unity, convinced that the Tractarian Movement pointed in that direction. For this reason, they urged prudence on the part of their fellow-Catholics, fearful that harsh criticism of Anglicanism would only antagonise those whom they were trying to attract. Phillipps, in 1842, wrote to the sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury:

The position of many of the Oxford men is more difficult than ever; it is not only utterly indefensible (*abstractedly*), but I am persuaded that its unsoundness *must* very soon become apparent to the men themselves. Still for God's sake never accuse the men who are in it at present of insincerity, for if you do, and this gets out, you will ruin all our prospects....

He continued:

¹⁴ Nicholas WISEMAN, *A Letter on Catholic Unity, Addressed to the Right Hon. the Earl of Shrewsbury* (London, 1841), pp. 33-4.

Above all let our weapon be *prayer*, not *abuse*; when we think we have a right to complain of them let us complain in the ear of our good God, who will keep our secret and per chance remedy it, not in the ear of our loquacious neighbours who will only make mischief for us, for them, and for the cause of God.¹⁵

In the same year, Phillipps wrote to Monsignor Acton about “what is sometimes called the *Puseyite*, but what ought more properly to be called the *Catholick* movement in the Church of England.” He stated that those involved in it at first merely took up high Church principles “as the basis of its operations,” but that gradually, after becoming acquainted with Catholic books, devotions and practices, they “began to see that what they called High Church Principles could only be fully carried out under a state of things, in which all the separated parts of Xtendom should again be brought back to Unity under the Primacy of the Apostolick See.” However, he wrote, these same men were then convinced that “*Rome* was so overwhelmed with *practical corruptions* that (however desirable on other grounds) union with Her under such circumstances was impracticable.” Later, however, through travel abroad, the Oxford men had achieved “a more accurate acquaintance with the actual condition of the Continental Churches.” They turned to scholastic authors and studied “the antient office books of the English Church before Her unhappy Fall, such as the Sarum Missal,” and such study led to admiration and “a deep regret for the wicked so-called Reformation.”¹⁶

The discovery described by Phillipps led some Roman Catholics to resurrect ancient liturgy, practices, and even architecture in an attempt to attract Protestants. This revival had preceded, to a certain extent, the publications of the Tractarians. Daniel Rock, a celebrated antiquarian and chaplain to the Earl of Shrewsbury, published his *Hierurgia* in 1833 and wrote in the Introduction: “Of the more intelligent and inquiring amongst our Protestant fellow-countrymen, several have occasionally manifested a desire to see a manual which not only contained the prayers, but explained the ceremonies and elucidated the doctrine of the Mass.” He then stated the purpose of his volume: “The purport of these pages is to fill up such a deficiency in the number of those well-composed and highly useful

¹⁵ Feast of the Dedication of S. John Lateran [November 9] 1842, in Edmund Sheridan PURCELL, *The Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle* (2 vols.; London, 1900), I, pp. 279-80.

¹⁶ Feast of the Conversion of St. Mary Magdalene [July 22] 1842, *ibid.*, pp. 230-8.

expositions of Catholic doctrine which we already possess.”¹⁷ The response and interest were such that he continued his researches in the preparation of his larger work, *The Church of Our Fathers*.¹⁸ In 1838 he urged Wiseman, still in Rome, to search out any manuscripts “in use among the *ancient Britons*.” “I am convinced this ancient British liturgy does somewhere exist,” he wrote, “and fondly hope to hear of its turning up in some monastic library at Bobbio, St. Gall, Milan or Rome.”¹⁹ Some Roman Catholics were fearful of Rock’s desire to publicise ancient British liturgies and practices, concerned that it might lead to an attempt to stress the national character of Catholicism in England. Bishop Walsh wrote the following disclaimer to Acton: “I heard that it was reported in Rome that there was an idea of the Sarum ritual being introduced into the Midland District. I can assure you, My dear friend, that I never once heard such a proposal named by anyone. I certainly never thought of it myself.”²⁰ Wiseman later wrote to Rock:

The revival of classical learning in the 15th and 16th centuries unhappily led to the contempt of authority & of simple truth. I should be sorry indeed if the revival of medieval studies should lead to the undermining of religious union, by the setting of nationalities in opposition to the universality of Christianity, points of the circumference in rivalry with the centre, admiration of the branches to the contempt of the trunk. The former revival led to heresy, let not the latter bring us into schism.²¹

In fact divisions among Catholics were evident already. Augustus Welby Pugin, convert to Rome and noted Gothic revivalist, was the object of much controversy. “Pugin had worked and longed for corporate reunion,” his biographer tells us, and “Catholic art was to help to bring it about, and from it was to spring further glories of Catholic art.”²² Pugin was an eccentric,

¹⁷ *Hierurgia; or the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Its Doctrines and Ceremonies* (2 vols.; London, 1897, 1st ed., 1833), vii.

¹⁸ *The Church of Our Fathers, As Seen in St. Osmund’s Rite and the Cathedral of Salisbury, with Dissertations on the Belief and Ritual in England before and after the Coming of the Normans* (3 vols.; London, 1849).

¹⁹ February 19, 1838, Ushaw College Archives, Wiseman Correspondence, #312.

²⁰ November 22, 1839, Vatican Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, III, p. 337.

²¹ May 12, 1840, Southwark Diocesan Archive, Rock Papers.

²² Michael TRAPPES-LoMAX, *Pugin, a Mediaeval Victorian* (London, 1932), p. 279.

unjustifiably scathing in his denunciations of those who disapproved of his work. He looked to the Tractarians as a source of support. “My dear Phillipps,” he wrote, “we nearly *stand alone* if we except the Oxford men, for among them I find full sympathy of feeling. But the real truth is the churches I build do little or no good for want of men who know how to use them.”²³ He is often and variously reported to have startled Father Spencer, whom he saw clothed in the Roman cope commonly worn in England rather than in one of the newer Gothic variety: “What! convert England with such a cope as that?”²⁴ Complaints went off to Rome regarding the ostentatious Pugin vestments. Bishop Walsh was afraid that Pugin’s intemperate attacks upon opponents might “have excited a good deal of unpleasant feeling against his friends at Oscott & in the Midland District & may I apprehend have lessened my influence with his Holiness & Propaganda.”²⁵ Walsh defended Pugin, however, in a letter to Acton:

Our great object... at the present time (when the glorious works of Catholic antiquity are exciting universal enquiries and admiration amongst Protestants) must be to identify ourselves with them by the decorations of our churches and buildings. It forms a most powerful argument for us to point to the tombs of the ancient Catholic Bishops & Priests & to shew the people that the identical vestments in which they are robed are still used by us. With some of the chasubles which we have at Oscott College we can turn to a Protestant and say “*the very vestment at the altar is older than your religion.*”²⁶

It must be clear that the work of conversion and even corporate reunion was uppermost in the minds of those Catholics who were sympathetic to the Tractarians. In most cases, the enthusiasm of such people exceeded any possible intention on the part of their Anglican friends. George Spencer, for example, was a man of “almost childish innocence of historical and theological subtleties.”²⁷ In 1840 he attempted what we might call a

²³ Denis GWYNN, *Lord Shrewsbury, Pugin and the Catholic Revival*, p. 74.

²⁴ Rev. Father Pius, *Life of Father Ignatius of St. Paul, Passionist* (Dublin, 1866), p. 276.

²⁵ Walsh to Wiseman, December 4, 1839, Rome, English College Archives, 70:6/57.

²⁶ November 22, 1839, Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, III, p. 336.

²⁷ Denis GWYNN, *Father Dominic Barberi* (London, 1947), p. 99.

“dialogue” with some of the Oxford divines. He was disconsolate when he described the experience to Phillipps: “I was brought during the first days of fight to the most astonishing point not only of having my battery regularly silenced but of being in a complete maze in my own mind.”²⁸ Five years earlier, Spencer had wondered whether or not he should accept a bishopric should it be offered to him, and, indeed, there was such a chance.²⁹ His over-enthusiasm and imprudence were to deny him further opportunity. In 1840 Walsh wrote to Wiseman of “good Mr. Spencer's failure at Oxford.” The bishop concluded that it would be “most dangerous to raise him at present to the Episcopal responsibility, for if when more left to himself he should again indulge his enthusiastic schemes, again commit himself with the acute learned Oxford divines and fail, that scandal & injury to our holy religion would be more to be lamented.” It was Spencer’s failure and not opposition to the principle of dialogue with the Oxford men that motivated Walsh’s letter, since he then wrote “You, my dear Dr. Wiseman, are the proper person to meet the Oxford divines, and I feel satisfied that were his Holiness & Propaganda fully aware of what is going on at Oxford & of the real state of religion in this country, they would rather press you than otherwise to come amongst us.”³⁰

Others shared Walsh’s fears regarding Spencer. In assessing the characteristics of those men proposed for vicariates in 1840, the vicar apostolic of the Northern District wrote next to Spencer’s name: “unfit – an enthusiast – no prudence.”³¹ Spencer, of course, was not selected to be a bishop, and, in fact, “Spencerite” among Roman Catholics became a name comparable to “Puseyite” among members of the Established Church. “I would not object to Wiseman as over-zealous & a Spencerite,” wrote the President of Ushaw College. He concluded: “They are all at Rome, through ignorance of this country, Spencerites.”³²

It was the enthusiastic efforts towards corporate reunion that especially divided Catholics. Bishop Baines found himself in a good deal of trouble with the Holy See when, in a pastoral letter, he forbade special public prayers for the conversion of England. Baines was summoned to Rome and rebuked, but he wrote in his own vindication:

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Rev. Father Pius, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

³⁰ January 24, 1840, Rome, English College Archives, 70:6/58.

³¹ Briggs to Griffiths, February 7, 1840, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, W1/2.

³² Newsham to Briggs, Sunday [February 15, ?] 1840, Leeds Diocesan Archives, Briggs Papers, #675.

I said I considered a general national conversion as morally impossible, but expressed my belief that there “would be a great and continually increasing number of converts.” Such being my firm persuasion I thought it wrong to allow a public weekly Mass to be offered up for obtaining what I thought it unreasonable to expect.

He continued:

I exhorted my flock “to pray as has been customary, for all spiritual and temporal blessings in favour of our country, and for the conversion of such erring souls as God in his mercy may be pleased so to favour, and of whom I doubted not there will be a great and continually increasing number.”³³

Baines thought that Wiseman was chiefly responsible for deceiving the Roman authorities regarding the possible reunion of the churches. He was in Rome when Wiseman was consecrated as bishop and wrote home:

The great delusion upon which most of the others have been built is that in the Midland District religion is making the most astonishing progress, & that, if the same zeal & energy could be exerted in the other Districts, England would be immediately converted. At the dinner given at Dr. Wiseman's consecration, Cardinal Fransoni [Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith] being present, it was said publicly & seriously, that another Gregory was sending another Augustine for the conversion of England!³⁴

Baines was not alone in blaming Wiseman. Charles Newsham, President of Ushaw, wrote to his bishop:

I would not fail to tell Cardinal Fransoni that Wiseman is much mistaken as to the flattering prospect of the conversion of this country; in fact, that he can have nothing better than a very cursory superficial knowledge of

³³ P. A. BAINES, *A Letter Addressed to Sir Chas. Wolseley, Bart. on the Lenten Pastoral of 1840* (Prior Park, 1841), p. 12.

³⁴ Baines to Griffiths, July 5, 1840, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, W1/2.

the feelings & prejudices of English protestants.³⁵

Wiseman had been one of the principal informants of the Holy See, describing the Oxford Movement in glowing terms and predicting glorious results for English Catholicism.³⁶ But Monsignor Acton had also been zealous in pointing out the interests of the Tractarians and in showing how their writings contained doctrines characteristic of the Church of Rome. Acton's dream, not unlike that of others, was that the movement that he mistakenly described as headed by Pusey would weaken and uproot the Established Church ("poco a poco toglierà delle sue radici la chiesa anglicana").³⁷ It is not surprising that the Holy See did not view favourably those Catholics who were critical of the Tractarians.

Many Catholics doubted the sincerity of the Oxford divines. Some were outrageously rash in their judgments. One Catholic clergyman not only denied "that this Oxford crisis is a real progress to Catholicism," but he considered "Mr. Newman, Dr. Pusey, and their associates, as wily and crafty, though unskilful guides."³⁸ He denounced all of the Tractarians, but he was sure, in particular, that "the embrace of Mr. Newman is the kiss that would betray us."³⁹ If the Anglican divines held Catholic doctrines, such people asked, how could they remain in the communion into which they had been born? A writer in the *Orthodox Journal* expressed a common opinion:

For three hundred years they have looked quietly on while we were the victims of cruel laws. They even aided in the capture of four priests. A word from them, a declaration of their present opinions, would have extinguished the burning faggot and sheathed the bloody knife; yet they were silent. Can we now believe them sincere, when they declare that their Church has always taught the doctrines which they now teach?⁴⁰

³⁵ Newsham to Briggs, March 15, 1840, Leeds Diocesan Archives, Briggs Papers, #691.

³⁶ Charles T. DOUGHERTY and Homer C. WELSH, "Wiseman on the Oxford Movement, an Early Report to the Vatican," *Victorian Studies* II (December, 1948), pp. 149-54.

³⁷ For what appears to be a rough draft of a letter to the Pope, written in Italian in Acton's handwriting, most probably right after he had returned to Rome after his brother's funeral at Aldenham Hall, Shropshire, 1837, see Rome, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, II, pp. 81-98.

³⁸ Joseph RATHBORNE, *Are the Puseyites Sincere? A Letter Most Respectfully Addressed to a Right Reverend Catholic Lord Bishop on the Oxford Movement* (London, 1841), p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ February 18, 1843, quoted in B. WARD, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 92-3.

And the outspoken editor of *The Tablet* condemned those who had diverted “the channel of Catholic exertion from those to whom it was first due – our own poor.” This had been done, he said, “to cocker up the silken vanity of respectable conversions, and a few barren, noisy, windy triumphs.”⁴¹

The Vicar Apostolic of the London District, Thomas Griffiths, a Catholic of the old school, suffered the wrath of the Pope himself for a piece that he wrote in the *Catholic Directory* the year after Bishop Baines had written his offensive pastoral. Griffiths wrote that in every age there have been schisms within the Christian world. “At their first separation,” he said, “leaders of schisms have denied a greater number of revealed truths, whilst others have rejected only a few.” He pointed out that in their progress the schismatics themselves were further divided “into other branches as hostile to each other as to the Catholic Church, which they had deserted.” He concluded:

As time has rolled on, we occasionally find them acknowledging some truths which they had formerly rejected as errors, and approaching in particular tenets nearer to the true Church which they had abandoned; but scarcely shall we find a body of schismatics returning with sincerity to the true faith.⁴²

Pope Gregory XVI reacted with unfeeling severity by writing a shocking letter to the London clergy in which he soundly condemned the views of their bishop:

For in truth... no belief is more deadly, none can prevail among you more likely to quench the admirable zeal for church building than that maintained recently by your Bishop in the *Catholic Directory*, namely, that it has never been heard of that a nation torn by schism from the Holy See ever returned of its own accord to the bosom of the Church.

The Pope continued in the same vein:

To what can it tend, such an opinion as this, utterly unsuited to the present time, except to check and discourage that noble band of Catholics, which with such effort of soul, such generous abundance of

⁴¹ *The Tablet*, November 4, 1843.

⁴² B. WARD, *op. cit.*, II, p. 101.

gifts, presses forward the building of churches? What, I repeat, can be the result of your Bishop's remarks but to hold back spirits eager for conversions, spirits more lofty than his own? And what country on earth, I should like to ask your sapient Bishop, was ever by the same cunning devices of its rulers robbed of the faith of its fathers, as your unhappy land has been?

Gregory then insisted that England was unique among nations and fortunate in having a group of "the most learned of those in schism in its richly endowed Universities, searching out all the arguments of antiquity, setting them forth without a thought of self-interest, publishing them in abundance for the general good." His Holiness concluded:

If therefore, this Bishop of yours, where everything is so clear, is the only man who cannot see the sky brightening in England, all the more must you and we take care, Beloved Sons, that you and the laity of England may not have your eyes darkened by the clouds that overshadow his.⁴³

The Pope's harsh criticism reflects the influence of Wiseman and others. His Holiness already viewed Griffiths with deep mistrust, however, since the London Vicar was reported to have been opposed to the regulars and, most especially, to the Jesuits who had been seeking permission to build a church in London against the wishes of the bishop. Griffiths was a devout, hard-working bishop, however, and while he lacked imagination, his predictions were nearer the truth than those of his critics, including Pope Gregory XVI.

There were others who wrote to the Holy See, moreover, urging caution in assessing the significance of the Oxford Movement. One such person, Thomas Brindle, wrote to Cardinal Acton in 1845 since, as he said, he knew that the Cardinal was interested "in everything connected with the Puseyite Party." Brindle was Regent of Prior Park and enthusiastic about the Catholic revival. He urged caution, however. He enclosed for Acton's perusal a copy of a letter from Pusey in which the latter had warned against rash predictions regarding Newman's future plans. "Were he at the last to feel himself compelled to go [over to Rome], it will not be as a reformer," wrote Pusey, "not with the expectation of finding anything or doing anything, but simply because he will not consider it safe for *him*, with *his* convictions to remain."

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-3.

But Pusey concluded “Every idea of what he will do, if he should feel himself compelled to this, is premature – he has none himself” Brindle had reason to believe, however, that Newman would convert only as a “reformer.” He wrote of the judgment of another friend who said that “Mr. Newman’s aim was to come over to us as a reformer, as there were... many things in the Church of Rome he disliked and some things he wholly disapproved.” Brindle, who felt that Catholicism in England was flourishing, thought that Acton should be forewarned.⁴⁴

Newman was of particular interest for Roman Catholics, especially after the publication of Tract XC in 1841. It was rumoured that the most famous of the Tractarians had experienced a vision in which he was assured that he should remain within the Established Church and from there make efforts towards reuniting his communion with that of Rome. William George Ward, who was to convert very shortly before Newman, was, along with Phillipps, responsible for the story.⁴⁵ Phillipps was embarrassed when the gossip became public. He wrote to Acton:

I judge that very erroneous statements have reached Rome respecting certain supposed supernatural communications made to Mr. Newman and others, who are at the head of the Catholic movement in Oxford, as though any individuals thought that such communications implied any Divine approbation of the state of Schism, in which the English Church is at present unhappily placed.

But Phillipps went on to acknowledge that certain individuals considered themselves “justified in remaining in the Church of England only in order to bring Her back to Unity.”⁴⁶ Phillipps had confided the nature of Newman’s supernatural communication to Lord Shrewsbury who asked: “Does not this sufficiently prove Newman’s vision to be an illusion of the Father of Lies?”⁴⁷

Even Newman’s former critics were delighted by his conversion and received him warmly. The praise of the Editor of *The Tablet* was not given without qualification, however:

⁴⁴ August 14, 1845, Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, pp. 230-1.

⁴⁵ E.S. PURCELL, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 280 and 291.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 235.

⁴⁷ Denis GWYNN, *Lord Shrewsbury, Pugin and the Catholic Revival*, xviii.

We make the fullest acknowledgement of the excellence of the men. No pride, no vain glory, no spirit of controversy shall make us grudge any reasonable praise that can be granted them [the Tractarians]. But as to their Church, it would be a gross want of charity ever to admit for a moment that anything, that any combination of events, can by possibility lead any instructed Catholic to think better of the Anglican organisation until it has ceased radically to be, what it radically is, a camp set up against the camp of the Lord of Hosts, and (like the armies of the Long Parliament) fighting in the name of the Great King against his authority.⁴⁸

What most annoyed Frederick Lucas, the Editor in question, who was himself a convert, although from Quakerism, was the attempt by some converts to justify their conduct in having remained within the Anglican communion even after they had become convinced of the falseness of their position. Lucas wrote when W.G. Ward converted: "Why should Mr. Ward be anxious to defend his past conduct? Speaking of course of his *acts* and not of his *motives*, if his present acts are right, his past were wrong. He is infinitely and blessedly inconsistent."⁴⁹

The general lack of understanding of the Tractarian Movement caused no end of difficulty for the converts, even after their reception into the Church of Rome. Indicative of the failure of the Roman Catholic community to realise initially what it had in Newman was a letter from the Rector of the English College who, in 1850, had been requested to obtain from the Holy See the honorary doctorate in divinity for Newman. The practice was not uncommon, especially in the case of Englishmen who had demonstrated outstanding ability in religious studies but who were ineligible for earned degrees from the two great English universities. Thomas Grant wrote:

I have... added that there was no evidence of Mr. Newman's theological learning on a great part of Theology, such as grace (unless the Treatise on Justification, which I have never read, should contain proof of knowledge on this point) and the Sacraments, and that in any case, it would be necessary to make the degree rest upon his Book of Sermons as being the principal evidence of his learning since he has entered the Church. As I have not read the Sermons, I

⁴⁸ *The Tablet*, October 25, 1845.

⁴⁹ *The Tablet*, September 6, 1845. For a fuller treatment of the attitude of Lucas towards the Tractarians, see Edward LUCAS, *The Life of Frederick Lucas, M.P.* (2 vols.; London, 1887), I, pp. 85-113.

cannot say whether the evidence deducible from them would be very effective or not.⁵⁰

It is regrettable that the Rector of the English College in Rome, charged with the education of the brightest aspirants for the priesthood among Englishmen, should have been so unfamiliar with Newman's writings.

Roman Catholics, as I have indicated, were poorly prepared to meet intellectually the Tractarians on their own ground. Steps had been taken early in the century to remedy the lack of facilities for higher education among Roman Catholics. However, the void was still felt and the Tractarian Movement provided a stimulus for those attempting to fill it, especially in providing a better education for future priests. In 1841, however, Wiseman was still able to write:

Let us have an influx of new blood, let us have but even a small number of such men as write in the Tracts, so imbued with the spirit of the early Church, so desirous to revive the image of the ancient fathers; men who have learnt to teach from Saint Augustine, to preach from Saint Chrysostom, and to feed from Saint Bernard – let even a few such men, with the high clerical feeling which I believe them to possess, enter fully into the spirit of the Catholic Religion and we shall be speedily reformed, and England quickly converted. I am ready to acknowledge that, in all things except the happiness of possessing the truth, and being in communion with God's true Church, and enjoying the advantages and blessings that flow thence, we are their inferiors.⁵¹

Wiseman saw himself as perhaps the only Englishman capable of communicating adequately with the Oxford divines. Before travelling to England in 1840, he had been assured that such was the case. "You are much wanted here... to write in defence of religion," wrote Charles Newsham. "The fact is we have not a man fully qualified for this task. Our priests are now hurried through their studies, and then placed on the mission where they have either no time or inclination for study." Newsham continued:

The consequence is an ignorance of church history, of antiquities, of the Fathers, of the original languages and even of the mode of disputation

⁵⁰ Grant to Wiseman, February 16, 1850, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, 137/1.

⁵¹ Wiseman to Phillipps, April 1, 1841, quoted in E.S. PURCELL, *op. cit.*, I, p. 290.

adopted by our opponents. To read the defence of religion that occasionally appears perfectly sickens me. We want a man to give a new tone to controversy, and you are that man.⁵²

In the meantime, Wiseman, as Rector of the English College, had initiated studies for the young men in Rome in order to prepare them for the task.⁵³ The programme was continued by his successor. Thomas Grant, the future rector who showed so little familiarity with Newman's work, had been a student in 1841 when he wrote to his bishop to describe how he and his classmates had applied themselves to the "Oxford Controversy." For two years, he wrote, they had regular winter classes on the early Fathers. Moreover, there were lectures and conferences on "the peculiar opinions of Anglican Divines" and "the method of refuting them."⁵⁴

After he moved to England, Wiseman hoped that Oscott College would prove especially valuable as a haven for Tractarians who might be interested in establishing a relationship with Roman Catholics. Land for a new college had been purchased in 1833, and by the time that Wiseman moved to England, the new buildings were in use. Purcell wrote that "as the Oxford Movement grew in vigour it undoubtedly reacted upon Oscott. At a later period the Catholic influence of Oscott was not un-felt by the Oxford Tractarians."⁵⁵ This was undoubtedly true, and Wiseman's presence there was a major factor in the tone of the new college. Bishop Walsh was delighted with Wiseman's achievement, stating that "the Oxford divines admire his talents and apply to him for advice."⁵⁶ At the same time, Wiseman was no administrator, and his varied interests and many contacts kept him away from the place for much of the time.⁵⁷ He was proud, nevertheless, of what he had achieved through Oscott, especially for new converts. He reported to the Holy See that Oscott was a meeting place between Roman Catholics and the heads of the "Puseyite party." His policy, he wrote, had been never to close Oscott's doors to anyone, even though the college did not have sufficient funds to take care of its own expenses. He said that converts were welcome to

⁵² August 10, 1838, quoted in B. WARD, *op. cit.*, I, p. 142.

⁵³ Wiseman to Griffiths, January 3, 1830, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, WI/2.

⁵⁴ Grant to Briggs, December 30, 1841, Leeds Diocesan Archives, Briggs Papers, #1128.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, I, p. 266.

⁵⁶ Walsh to Acton, St. Swithan's Day [July 15] 1842, Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Spogli Acton, III, p. 400.

⁵⁷ W. WARD, *op. cit.*, I, p. 350.

stay there until means of support could be found for them, a particularly difficult problem in the case of converted clergymen. Wiseman calculated that in a period of two years, the college had maintained continuously at least fifteen persons in such circumstances at a cost of 200 pounds each or a total cost of 6,000 pounds. He estimated that, in all, the care of converts had cost the Central District 75,800 pounds.⁵⁸

Although the question of conversions was central to the whole relationship of Roman Catholics to the Tractarians, even the most enthusiastic supporters of the movement were aware of the fact that it could not take all the credit for the influx of Protestants into the Catholic Church. Phillipps, in 1841, considered the Oxford Movement to be “the brightest symptom of England’s reconversion”, but, he wrote, “thank God it is not the only one. There is a general movement amongst the lower classes, which is most consoling.”⁵⁹ Shortly after his own conversion, Newman wrote an interesting letter, recently discovered and published, in which he denied that scholarly or polemical works were the principal factor in conversions. He wrote to F.C. Husenbeth, well-known as a Catholic polemicist:

It cannot be doubted that books so well known as your own must have had, and have, an important influence on the minds of religious persons who are external to the Church; ...But one of the most remarkable peculiarities and evidences of Catholicism is the variety of methods by which persons are led to it. As some are led by argument, so others by imagination, others by remorse and unrest. As far as I have means of knowing, none of these means have been primary in the Oxford Movement – which has been a sort of quiet growth, and a dawning of light, in the soul – aided of course by external means, but not strictly referrible to them.⁶⁰

While discussing the problem of conversion, one must take into account the influence of Daniel O’Connell and the Irish party who were hostile to the Tractarians. Wiseman was unsuccessful in trying to dissuade O’Connell from abusing them. There had been hope among men like Phillipps that a union could be formed between the High Church party and Roman Catholics: “Like many of the Catholic aristocracy of the nineteenth century, he opposed

⁵⁸ A draft of this report, undated but probably written in 1847, is in the Ushaw College Archives, Wiseman Correspondence, #559B.

⁵⁹ E.S. PURCELL, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 106-7.

⁶⁰ November 20, 1845, quoted in Lawrence D. McINTOSH, “An Unpublished Letter of John Henry Newman,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, (October, 1973), pp. 429-33.

O'Connell's linking of the Catholic cause with the fortunes of the Whigs.⁶¹ He then hoped that a Catholic party might be a possibility in itself, "the basis of whose policy upon all questions, whether secular or religious, must be *Catholic principles*." He went on: "Once let such a party arise clearly defined, and in the present state of opinion in England, you will quickly see the *good men* out of all other parties rally round it." He concluded with an observation with which the Tractarians would not have disagreed: "The misery at present is, the Catholics now form a subordinate portion of the Whig party, that is of the party the abstract theory of which is in fact *Infidelity*."⁶² The point was, of course, that Tractarians considered the Tory Party to be the Church party. How, they asked, could they identify with the Whigs who included among their ranks men set upon the destruction of the Church and, perhaps, religion itself?

Some felt that the restoration of a Roman Catholic hierarchy would lead to the reunion of churches. Phillipps was convinced that "if this were done Catholic Bishops would be prepared for the old Sees ready to take the place of the Anglican ones as they died off, when once Government should take the Reunion up." This fine example of self-deception indicates how little Phillipps understood the feeling of most Tractarians. He concluded: "Besides which, vast numbers of Anglicans would join us at once if they could see the primitive form of Church government restored amongst us."⁶³ Wiseman used a similar argument five years later when, in Rome, he was preparing a petition for the restoration of the hierarchy. Militant Protestants, he argued, had been claiming that the Holy See had no power or authority to name bishops because the succession of Anglican bishops demonstrated clearly their right to the ancient sees. Wiseman said that such an argument, though weak, had been sufficient to hold many persons in Anglicanism, since the Established Church was the only one possessing a hierarchy. He saw the restoration of a Roman Catholic hierarchy as an "efficacious means of bringing about the return of many to the faith."⁶⁴ He still held this opinion even during the papal aggression crisis resulting from the establishment of the hierarchy in 1850. He

⁶¹ Louis ALLEN, "Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, 1809-1878," *The Catholic Historical Review*, XL (April, 1954), p. 25.

⁶² Denis GWYNN, *Lord Shrewsbury, Pugin and the Catholic Revival*, p. 93. For Newman's Anglican view of the state of the Catholic Church in Ireland, see E.S. PURCELL, *op. cit.*, I, p. 223.

⁶³ E.S. PURCELL, I, pp. 237-8.

⁶⁴ Draft of Wiseman's petition, Ushaw College Archives, Wiseman Correspondence, #559A. For the entire case made in favour of the restoration of the hierarchy in 1847, see Rome, Archivio Storico della Sagra Congregazione *de Propaganda Fide*, Congregazioni Particolari, CLVII, 45 ff.

then wrote:

I have every hope that a most favourable reaction, from shame and remorse will set in. Moreover, you will see that the apple of discord has been fully thrown into the Church of England and the Puseyites must be driven out of it, or must neutralise the agitation in it. But the most important thing is, do not let our Holy Father be alarmed in the least; the storm has been violent, but so shamelessly so, that it can neither last, nor leave any impression.⁶⁵

The reaction was not so immediate or far-reaching as he had anticipated.

Wiseman then turned to the question of the validity of Anglican orders, convinced that the belief that their orders were valid prevented many from converting. In preparing for the first Provincial Synod of Westminster, the Cardinal drew up a list of proposed decrees and wrote concerning one of them:

You will see that I have proposed the formal decision of the question of Anglican orders to be asked for by the Synod. This would make it a more dignified question, and give a better ground than any private application – do not you think so? Let me know if this is approved, where we should wish it; and communicate to me any desires of the Holy Father.

He added a postscript:

I forgot to say that I consulted Newman about the Anglican orders and I think he is decidedly of opinion that a decision would take the married clergy out of much pain and scruple, and would greatly facilitate the coming over of many, detained by truth in their orders.⁶⁶

There were objections to Wiseman's proposal from some of the other English bishops, and no such decree was proposed or passed by the synod.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wiseman to Talbot, November 9, 1850, Rome, English College Archives, Talbot Papers, #1102.

⁶⁶ Wiseman to Talbot, May 27, 1852, *ibid.*, #1141.

⁶⁷ See R.J. SCHIEFEN, "The First Provincial Synod of Westminster (1852)," *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* (1972), pp. 194-5.

Most Roman Catholics, then, were ignorant of the Oxford Movement. As Tractarian influence became more widespread and as conversions to Catholicism increased, however, so did interest in the movement. Most Catholics were very slow to acknowledge any direct advantages to religion as a result of the tracts. Some, in fact, considered them to be hypocritical and dangerous. Consequently there were some harsh Catholic critics of the Tractarians. There were also a few, however, who were unduly optimistic and enthusiastic. They felt that any interest in Catholic doctrine and ritual was bound to lead to greater understanding and eventually to the reunion of churches.

Conversion was the great objective of Catholic enthusiasts, but other tangible effects upon the Catholic Church in England must be cited. Among these was the desire and not altogether unsuccessful attempt to upgrade higher education among Catholics.⁶⁸ Nicholas Wiseman was in the forefront of those making such efforts, but it must not be supposed that the vicars apostolic had been unaware of this particular need. The Tractarian Movement provided an added impetus, however, and, in addition, a number of Roman Catholics seized the occasion to write books and pamphlets of more lasting value than the apologetical works of previous decades, timely and necessary, perhaps, but more characteristic of those on the defensive than of those expounding confidently their faith to an interested reading public. Catholic scholarship, in its turn, led to an increased interest in ancient practice and ritual, not to mention art and architecture.

Finally, I think, one can detect a softening of tone in the controversy between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. There were to be fierce battles in the future, of course, but in such instances (e.g. the debates over government support of Maynooth, the papal aggression crisis of 1850-1851, and the debates over "Vaticanism" in 1874-1875), both sides were well-represented by men who urged moderation and understanding. Differences were not denied, but condemnations were less sweeping and criticisms less personal than might have been the case in the first three decades of the century. It would be difficult to prove or even to demonstrate causality in this regard. But the desire for understanding was evident in the response of some Catholics to the Tractarian Movement. Luigi Gentili, a well-known Rosminian missionary in England, wrote to William George Ward in 1841:

If we really wish to advance towards reunion, it is high time that we

⁶⁸ The most recent study of higher education for Roman Catholics in modern England is Vincent Alan MCCLELLAND, *English Roman Catholics and Higher Education, 1830-1903* (Oxford, 1973).

should banish from our heart all jealousies, fears, mutual diffidence and reserve, that we should enter in a holy, open and communicative friendship, and seeking Christ alone and not ourselves, work hand in hand for the great object we both have in view, namely the glory of God in promoting the union and triumph of his Church.⁶⁹

No modern ecumenist has expressed it better, and, in fact, such sentiments abound in the correspondence between Catholics and Tractarians in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ November 8, 1841, in Claude LEETHAM, *Luigi Gentili, a Sower for the Second Spring* (London, 1965), pp. 166-7.