

Problems in Church History: twenty years on

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If one goes back twenty years one finds that a significant change had already taken place in the attitude of many church historians to their subject. Traditionally, in Britain, the specialist 'church historian' studied the institutions, beliefs and political fortunes of christian bodies of all kinds: he wrote from the Church outward, so to speak, and one of the most important roots of his discipline had been incessant argument about what happened to 'the Church' in England in the sixteenth century — an argument by no means closed at the present time. He usually had an overriding belief in the providential direction of history: when one of the founders of the modern discipline, Mandell Creighton, gave his inaugural lecture as professor of Church History in Cambridge in 1885 he said that the church historian saw in the history of Christianity the traces of God's working in the world, and burned to show how the Church had knit European society together in the past and must be its bond in the future.¹ Even now standard textbooks like J.R.H. Moorman's *A History of the Church of England* (1953) reflect Creighton's point of view. Indeed, the church historian may sometimes still appear in a theologically partisan role: Edward Norman, for example, in his *Church and Society in England 1770–1970* (1976), bowed to contemporary fashion in his title (which reflected the influence of sociology on church history), but the book was essentially about the Church of England, and its later chapters paid less attention to 'history' than to the author's passionate opposition to the prevalence of 'radical theology' and 'christian socialism' in the governing circles of Anglicanism.

Nevertheless, by the 1960s the signs of a change had become apparent. There was a perceptible shift away from the history of the 'Church' as a (perhaps) divine society, a special case, to the study of the history of religion itself, and especially the western religious tradition, inside or outside Britain. There were many reasons for this. As the British Empire dissolved, for example, the study of the impact of Christianity on Africa, China and India

passed into the hands of historians with little theological or sentimental attachment to what the missionary societies had done. They saw the history of christian missions, not as part of a divine plan, but as an alien episode in the history of religiously self-providing societies. Paul Cohen's *China and Christianity* (Harvard, 1963), Thomas Metcalfe's *The Aftermath of Revolt in India 1857-70* (Princeton, 1964), J.F.A. Ajayi's *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891* (1965), and Robert Rotberg's *Christian Missionaries and the Creation of Northern Rhodesia* (Princeton, 1965), all came out in the 1960s: in them, the historian's interest was moving, not from the Church outwards, but from the non-christian society towards the christian community and its institutions. In the long run the dramatic alteration in the position of Christianity outside Britain was bound to affect the way in which British church historians regarded the history of religion in Britain itself. Moreover, in Britain after 1945 younger church historians were conscious that christian institutions seemed to be in decline, and this decline gradually affected their perspective of British religious history at least as far back as the Reformation, though it is one of the points of this essay that 'church history' has not yet been sufficiently transformed. Other powerful influences came from Marxism (through Christopher Hill and Edward Thompson, for example), from anthropology (through Keith Thomas), and from the sociology of religion (through Bryan Wilson).

These new influences and interests produced valuable new work. This included, for example: (a) a fresh reading of English Roman Catholic history since the Reformation, and a more sophisticated study of J.H. Newman (John Bossy, Stephen Dessain); (b) research into sixteenth-century puritanism and popular religion (Keith Thomas, Alan Macfarlane, Christopher Hill, Michael Walzer); (c) new approaches to the history of Methodism (Edward Thompson, Bernard Semmel, John Kent, Reginald Ward); (d) a wave of research into Victorian church history, including Victorian sects and working-class religion (Owen Chadwick, Brian Harrison, James Obelkevich, Kenneth Thomas among many). Side by side with this one must set comparative failures, such as the lack of a reinterpretation of English Protestantism equivalent to John Bossy's new understanding of Catholicism in England; the reluctance to study eighteenth-century English religion; the feeling that Victorian 'church history' still sits too complacently in a frame largely invented by Victorians themselves; a gap in the area of women's history, so that one can find little written about English

church history to set beside Ann Douglas's fascinating book, *The Feminization of American Culture*, which, despite its title, is about what happened to American religion between the 1780s and the 1880s; and finally, the fact that nothing significant has been done on the Ecumenical Movement since the publication of Bryan Wilson's rather brutal attack on the problem in *Religion in Secular Society* in 1966. We must look at these points in more detail.

(a) John Bossy's *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (1975), and J.H.C. Aveling's *The Handle and the Axe* (1976), which covered much the same period, completed the revival of modern English Catholic historical studies which might be said to have begun with the publication in 1961 of the first volume of the still unfinished edition of *The Letters and Diaries of J.H. Newman*,¹ edited by Stephen Dessain of the Birmingham Oratory. Bossy's work is important because he argued in detail that the history of the post-Reformation Catholic community in England was not a process of continuous decline which reached bottom in the eighteenth century, thence to be rescued by a miraculous 'second spring' for which Newman and the Oxford converts were responsible, but a patient growth from small beginnings in which the eighteenth century was marked by modest progress and careful preparation for the future; this means that he also rejected the other widely-held view that the Catholicism of modern England is the result of Irish emigration into an alien land which had little or no indigenous Catholic tradition. He also situates the history of the English Catholic community within the general history of nonconforming bodies in England: he divides English Dissent into a Protestant and a non-Protestant segment, placing in the first the earlier Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists, and in the second Catholics, Quakers and Unitarians. Of course, both Bossy and J.H.C. Aveling are reacting to the need of present-day English Catholicism to adjust its past in terms of its changed position in the religious sub-culture of British society, but what matters more is that one is persuaded to look again at the traditional myths of British religious history. A similar re-examination of myth has affected the study of Newman: in *Newman and the Common Tradition* (1970), John Coulson offered a vision of a moderately liberal Newman integrated into an Anglican tradition which could be described in terms of Coleridge and F.D. Maurice. In English ecumenical politics, of course, Newman (like Sir Thomas More) has long been a major Catholic counter, and there is a well-organised campaign for his canonization. This sometimes leads to extravagant claims on his behalf in

ecclesiastical circles, as when Dermot Fenton wrote that 'it was left to Newman to demonstrate that development in doctrine, far from being a mark of infidelity, was in reality a sign of the Church . . . Newman accomplished an understanding of the question which entitles him to be ranked among the great theologians of all time. His *Essay on Development* alone makes it not ridiculous to speak of him in the company of Augustine and Aquinas: it is perhaps the greatest work of theological genius since the *Summa Theologica* . .

it gave the definitive reply to the argument that the Catholic Church was historically responsible for a false development of christian doctrine'.³ Of course, Newman's *Development* offered an able defence of the historical growth of the official system of Roman Catholic doctrine, but it was no more; he did not anticipate the direction in which modern criticism of the dogmatic principle would go.

(b) When one comes to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as such one finds that 'church history' and 'political history' overlap so much that this must be my ground for the omission of many useful books. Nevertheless, the new interests did stand out for a time, especially in Keith Thomas's monumental *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England*, (1971), as well as in Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a regional and comparative study* (1970); *The Family of Ralph Josselin* (1970); and *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-83* (1976). Keith Thomas (like Macfarlane) applied the insights of recent social anthropology to the history of religion in England at its most critical point; in doing so he violated, from the point of view of traditional 'church history', a slowly forming consensus that the English Reformation was an institutional matter, to be looked at institutionally; that English Protestantism was to be defined in Anglican terms as a series of relatively minor theological and ecclesiastical modifications to the English medieval Church, and that 'separatists', 'radicals' and 'puritans' were outsiders. (Indeed, 'puritans' became increasingly difficult to define at all, perhaps because neither Anglican nor Roman Catholic historians had any real use for them, historically speaking.)

Keith Thomas, however, having devised a clear account of how the medieval English Church combined religion and magic, saw the main thrust of Protestantism as expressing a widespread rejection of the traditional set of religious practices: "the decline of the old Catholic beliefs was not the result of persecution; it reflected a change in the popular conception of religion . . . Protestantism

presented itself as a deliberate attempt to take the magical elements out of religion, to eliminate the idea that the rituals of the Church had about them a mechanical efficiency, and to abandon the effort to endow physical objects with supernatural qualities by special formulae of consecration and exorcism'.⁴ Paradoxically, this gradual semi-secularization of the English Churches meant that magic had a temporary increase of popularity; nevertheless, the hold of both magic and Christianity on English society had drastically weakened by the eighteenth century.⁵ One might add that the attempts of various nineteenth-century movements to return to more primitive versions of Christianity did not restore Christianity to the cultural centre, and that this helps to justify the use of the 'history of religions' approach. Keith Thomas's interpretation seems to me more subtle than that of Christopher Hill, for example, in *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), where the alleged 'puritan' creed is translated as the ideology of a new class emerging from the wreckage of feudalism, and the late seventeenth-century crisis of 'modernity is left as an inexplicable shift from religious individualism to market economy rationalism; or for that matter Michael Walzer's *The Revolution of the Saints* (Harvard, 1965), in which the 'puritans' are better-class but more totally alienated from both the social and ecclesiastical society: Thomas was allowing 'religion' its own history, instead of always reducing it to non-religious factors. In fact, Frank Manuel's *Religion of Isaac Newton* (1974) probably tells one more about seventeenth-century religion than either Hill or Walzer, because Manuel enables one to see how Newton's mind was littered with Biblical prophetic furniture not only antique, but useless, like the long galleries at Knowle. One has a vivid glimpse of a religious world of prophecy which might still have been intelligible to Newman in the nineteenth century, but is no longer part of our culture in the way in which it was taken seriously by Newton.

A younger generation of church historians, however, has not been unduly impressed by the 'history of religion' approach. When Rosemary O'Day and Felicity Heal edited and contributed to *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church in England 1500-1642* (Leicester 1976), Patrick Collinson, who had himself written on Elizabethan Puritanism, commented that 'it will be useless to seek here for signs of that millenium anticipated in the sixties by Mr Keith Thomas and other advocates of the 'new ways'; no anthropology, little 'popular religion', not as much as a cross-reference to *Annales* . . . But the editors can point

to the neglect of the institutional history of the post-Reformation Church of England. The attention paid since the war to the local ecclesiastical archives on which almost everything in this book is based has not been adequately reflected in print'.⁶ O'Day and Heal edited two further books of essays: *Church and Society in England: Henry the Eighth to James the First* (1977); and *Princes and Paupers in the English Church 1500–1800* (Leicester, 1981). The former collection turned to the question: 'How significant was religious ideology in England in the sixteenth century?' and argued, rather against the drift of Thomas and Macfarlane, that provincial society remained religious at all levels down to 1600; the latter volume was devoted to the economy of the Church of England, concentrating on the income of the bishops, parish clergy, chaplains and so on.⁷ This institutional interest has bred a steady shift to regional and diocesan studies. For those interested in regional studies there are, for example: *The Reformation in Essex* (1965) by J.E. Oxley; *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex* (1969) by R.B. Manning; *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (1975) by C. Haigh; and *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution* (1977) by P. Clark, a book about Kent between 1500 and 1640, which made much of 'radical' religion.

(c) Non-Anglican church history has been fully professionalised only since 1945. The study of Methodism profited most, though more in terms of the nineteenth than of the eighteenth century. Little, however, was done to clarify the problems of the origins of the eighteenth-century Protestant religious recovery, between John Walsh's essay, 'Origins of the Evangelical Revival' (in *Essays in Modern Church History*, ed. G. Bennett and J. Walsh, 1966), which discussed the possible internal English sources of the various movements; and W.R. Ward's essay, 'Power and Piety: The Origins of Religious Revival in the early Eighteenth Century' (in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 1980), which sought to relate what happened in England to sources in European Protestantism. In fact, insufficient work has been done on popular religion in England in the eighteenth century to make sound judgements possible; even the relations between Anglicans and Wesleyans between 1740 and 1815 have not been properly worked out. The Oxford University Press has started to publish a 34-volume edition of *The Works of John Wesley* under the general editorship of Frank Baker, and three volumes have so far been issued, but this project will probably only prolong the tendency of historians of Methodism to concentrate on Wesley instead of on

the religious movement with which he was associated. There is an excellent antidote to this obsession, V.H.H. Green's short, incisively critical biography, *John Wesley* (1964).

In recent years the principal thrust of 'church history' and 'history of religion' has been in nineteenth-century studies, and the interpretation of Methodism has been a central issue. Since 1960 fresh versions have been offered of the familiar but quite unproveable Halévy thesis⁸ that one should first suppose that English society was threatened with revolution between 1740 and 1840, and then assume that one can find in the history of Methodism an important part of the explanation of the apparent non-occurrence of this revolution. In these new versions, interpretations of religion interlock with class-based interpretations of the development of English society between about 1780 and the High Victorian years. E.P. Thompson, for example, in *The Making of the English Working-Class*, (1963) seemed at times to argue that the psychological content of Methodist revivalism emasculated the proletariat.⁹ Harold Perkin, in *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (1969), lumped Methodism and the remainder of Nonconformity together (but did not anticipate John Bossy by adding Catholicism to the mixture) and described this total Nonconformity as the 'midwife' of the nineteenth-century class-structure. The role of sectarian religion, he said, was threefold: 'to give expression to emancipation from the dependency system before it hardened into overt antagonism; and not so much by passive teaching of patience as by active example of the benefit of non-violent organisation, to influence class-conflict in the direction of non-violence'. Perkin did not make clear just how Nonconformity produced such a powerful effect specifically on the English working-class, but he certainly saw membership of movements like Wesleyanism as tending to neutralise a political stance. Bernard Semmel, on the other hand, in *The Methodist Revolution* (1974), interpreted Wesleyan theology in terms of R.R. Palmer's 'democratic revolution of the eighteenth century' — see *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton, 1959): Wesleyan doctrine constituted an essentially liberal, progressive ideology which confirmed and helped to advance the shift from a traditional to a modern society. For Thompson, then, the effect of the Wesleyan ideology was to corrupt the working-class, whereas for Perkin and Semmel the effect was socially healthy. A 'good' revolution was substituted for Halévy's 'bad' revolution, so to speak. In the meantime, E.J. Hobsbawm (in *Labouring Men*, 1964) doubted the connexion between Methodism and the absence of revolution, as did John

Kent, (especially in 'Salvation and Politics', Open University broadcast, 1975-82).

In all these studies Methodism was being examined from the outside, and attempts were being made to see it as religion acting in society, though not all these writers had a very clear idea of what they meant by religion. Perhaps Thompson tried harder than any of the others to convey what he thought that the world might have looked like through the eyes of a Wesleyan adept; in fact, however, Thompson could not establish that Wesleyanism functioned as the working-class religion of consolation which his Marxism permitted him; moreover, he seemed to be describing a 'chiliasm of despair' much less typical of the Wesleyans than of Anglican Evangelicals and members of the millennialist sects. These latter have been studied with half an eye on anthropology by W.H. Oliver, in *Prophets and Millennialists: the Use of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland University Press, 1978), which contains work on the Southcottians, the Irvingites and the Mormons; and in *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850*, by J.F.C. Harrison (1979), which covers similar ground, and in which millenarianism is used as a conceptual tool with which to explore what Harrison calls a 'popular culture', but which looks more like the survival at a very much lower intellectual level of the interest in 'prophecy' which had been natural in the mind of Isaac Newton. These books depended less on Marxism, or on traditional 'church history', than on English work in the sociology of religion, notably that of Bryan Wilson, whose *Sects and Society* (1961) was based on valuable research into the Victorian history of Christian Science and Christadelphianism, and whose *Magic and the Millenium* (1973) was a sociological analysis of religious movements of protest. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, English institutionalised Christianity was already contracting into a sub-culture distinct from the mainstream culture of the society as a whole, and what Oliver and Harrison are describing was probably more important for the understanding of the Churches than some 'church historians' assume, and less important for the understanding of 'popular culture' than Thompson and Harrison supposed.¹⁰

A much more sustained historical discussion of nineteenth-century 'popular religion' and its relation to popular culture, at any rate in the countryside, is contained in *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-75*, by James Obelkevich (1976), which was an examination of Anglicanism, Methodism (Wesleyan and Primitive), and popular religion in the central districts of Lincolnshire.

Obelkevich defined popular religion as 'the non-institutional religious beliefs and practices, including unorthodox conceptions of christian doctrine and ritual, prevalent in the lower ranks of rural society. It was not a unitary phenomenon: it can best be understood as an amalgam, a loose combination of unofficial Christianity and a rather larger measure of pagan 'survivals' . . . Yet even if it was not hostile to Christianity, the Church could not avoid being hostile to what it regarded as superstition . . .'.¹¹ Obelkevich said that in the course of the nineteenth century a process of depersonalization affected popular religion and superstition: 'superstition subsided to the level of luck, its impersonal lowest common denominator'.¹² Obelkevich thought that this was the 'most important set of changes in popular religion since the Reformation', and he inevitably sought an explanation in social change, because he was committed to the Feuerbachian position that the secret of religious history is social history. This led him to adopt what seems to me an implausible argument that these changes depended on the replacement of an older village 'community' by a fully developed class society in village terms.¹³ This sentimentality apart, *Religion and Rural Society* makes a remarkable contribution to the study of modern English religious history.

As for the 'church history' of early nineteenth-century Methodism, much new light has come from W.R. Ward's edition of the letters of the Wesleyan leader, Jabez Bunting, in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-29* (1972), and *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-58* (1976). A final section of the Bunting letters was published, edited by A.J. Hayes and David Gowland, in *Scottish Methodism in the Early Victorian Period: the Scottish Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1800-57* (Edinburgh, 1981). On the basis of this and other research Professor Ward produced his own interpretation of the period in *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (1972). There is little or no trace of the 'history of religion' approach; one glimpses society as the background of the incessant internal upheavals of Methodists, Dissenters, Unitarians and Anglicans, with the north and especially Manchester — alas for *Southern History* — as the principal battleground, with Leeds, Liverpool, Rochdale and Stockport in close attendance. What emerges in the Methodist case is the image of a conflict between open, popular, lay forms of religious organisation on the one hand, and on the other 'denominational', authoritarian, clerical organisations strongly supported by locally successful businessmen. The authoritarians triumph, and this becomes a paradigm for the whole society, in

which Christianity (not religion, which is not Ward's subject) contracts in consequence. Professor Ward sees the subject-matter of 'modern church history' as the decline of the Churches, and he holds that 'church history' ought to be able to provide an understanding of that recent history from its own resources. When he reviewed the second volume of Owen Chadwick's *Victorian Church* (1970), he complained that ecclesiastical history seemed incapable of providing such a framework of explanation and added: 'If general historical scholarship can do no better, then both religion and history may succumb to the myth-making skills of the sociologists'.¹⁴ As for the sociologists, he might have had in mind such confident pronouncements as this by Thomas Luckmann: 'the degree of involvement in the work processes of modern industrial society correlates negatively with the degree of involvement in church-oriented religion'.¹⁵ With such theories, who needed history? Ward himself, however, was coming close to a reassertion of the traditional view that 'church history' constitutes a special case because its subject-matter in the last analysis is a supernaturally-supported institution.

(d) Nevertheless, historians influenced by sociology and social anthropology have had a field-day with Victorian religious history, if only because the sense of the imminent institutional collapse of Christianity (which they share with writers like Professor Ward) has made theory seem at least as important as the grind of establishing a detailed narrative. The situation does not altogether differ from that in contemporary Marxism, where historians of the Althusserian school assert that theory must precede any kind of praxis, while rebels like Edward Thompson reply that 'the relation between historical knowledge and its object cannot be understood in any terms which suppose that one is a function (inference from, disclosure, abstraction, illustration etc) of the other. Interrogation and response are mutually determining, and the relation can be understood only as a dialogue'.¹⁶ When one looks at the apparent conflict in the Church of England in the nineteenth century, for example, it seems amazing that the basic narratives — accounts of the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic groups, for instance — have not even been written; and much the same is true of the non-Anglican Protestants.¹⁷ Even in the case of a less restricted approach, as when Professor Chadwick covered the whole period in *The Victorian Church*, one finds that when he tackled the second half of the century he was unable to disentangle events from the web of Anglican myth in which they had already become enmeshed; one need only compare his weak section on

'secularization' (in the second volume of *The Victorian Church*) with his far more penetrating treatment of the same problem in *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (1975) to accept that we shall have to set up a new dialogue between theory and event before a plausible fresh narrative becomes available. One cannot simply 'go back to narrative': the myth-making of the sociologically-minded historian has its uses. In the meantime, 'church history' has not yet fully absorbed the material with which it has to deal.

As this volume of *Southern History* is devoted to English ecclesiastical history and particularly to the Anglo-Catholic movement whose centenary and a half falls in 1983, it is appropriate to take as an example of the orthodox tradition one of the few books published recently on an aspect of Anglo-Catholic history: *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain*, by James Bentley (1978).¹⁸ This is the first detailed account of the unsuccessful campaign by the late Victorian bishops, led by Archbishop Tait, to stop the spread of Anglo-Catholicism by fixing new legal limits to the freedom of the parish clergy to introduce ritual innovations into their parish services. Tait hoped to discipline the Anglo-Catholic 'ritualists' by means of the Public Worship Regulation Act, and Bentley described both the passage of the Act (1874) and how it was reduced by non-compliance to a dead letter by 1906, when a Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline was set up as a screen for the official retreat. Bentley made good use of the recently available papers of Lord Cairns, Disraeli's evangelical Lord Chancellor, and of material from the provincial press, but his analysis was firmly controlled by Anglo-Catholic tradition — religious groups are quite as skilful myth-makers as sociologists. He concluded that 'by refusing to be put down the ritualists not only preserved the Anglican clergyman's ancient freedom; they also advanced the cause of toleration in Victorian Britain'.¹⁹ This was to interpret the 'ritualists' as they interpreted themselves. The three-way struggle between very moderate institutionalists like Tait, Anglo-Catholic extremists like Pusey, and Evangelical Anglican extremists like J.C. Ryle, was not about individual liberty and toleration, but about the credibility of 'Anglicanism' as either idea or institution; about the role of the laity (quite as much as of the priesthood) in the Established Church; and about the credibility of Christianity in a modernising society. That Tait failed to make Anglo-Catholicism 'Anglican' cannot be disputed; that his defeat was all part of Anglo-Catholicism's regeneration of the Victorian Church of England — the traditional view — is what the critical

historian has to test. My own view of both Anglo-Catholicism and Anglican Evangelicalism as 'undeclared sects' is set out in *Holding the Fort* (1978).²⁰

Although we have not yet succeeded in rewriting the accepted myth of Victorian 'church history' in terms of a history of nineteenth-century English religion, it is not difficult to make a list of books which are already helping to transform our understanding of our recent religious past. This list would have to include: *Bureaucracy and Church Reform: The organizational response of the Church of England to Social Change 1800-1965* (1970) by K.A. Thompson; *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England* (1971), by Brian Harrison; *Religion and Social Class: the Disruption Years in Aberdeen* (1974), by A.A. Maclaren; *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974), by Hugh McLeod; *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: the effects of Methodism in a Durham mining community* (1974) by Robert Moore; *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (1976), by A.D. Gilbert; *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976) by Stephen Yeo; *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church growth in the British Isles since 1700* by R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley; and Susan Budd's *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society* (1977).²¹

Obviously, my space is limited, and only one of these books is much concerned with Anglo-Catholicism. This is Kenneth Thompson's *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, which was based on the premise that since 1800 outside changes in society had compelled the Church of England to face the theoretical need both to 'rationalize' its structure and to create the centralising bureaucracy which such a programme entailed. In practice, no 'Anglican' consensus could be formed in the Victorian period to achieve such ends. As Thompson said: 'nothing deterred Newman from leading a movement to fight the rationalistic pragmatism of the new middle class, under the banner of the Church as the embodiment of transcendental values and supernatural qualities'.²² If one attempts to interpret Anglo-Catholicism along these lines, one may regard it, together with 'Anglicanism's' other undeclared sect, Anglican Evangelicalism, as being at least as much a ground of decay as of regeneration. 'What was needed in the long run was a theory which could reconcile expediency in adapting norms (the concern of the reformers) with legitimation in terms of religious principles (the emphasis of the Oxford Movement',²³ but neither of the 'church parties' was able either to produce such a theory itself, or

to accept, within the Victorian period, a theory proffered from outside. This was analysis in the spirit of Weber rather than Durkheim, and the emphasis is not congenial to church historians for whom the Church (however visible) still retains a supernatural origin, but, as Professor Ward suggested, myth, or analytical structure there must be, and if the historians hesitate to criticise the myths of the institutions whose stories they narrate, then the social scientists will do the criticising for them.

Notes

¹ M. Creighton, *Historical Lectures and Addresses* (1903), p. 22. As to providence, no one was more aware than Creighton, who studied the sixteenth century, that the history of the Church was full of 'corruption', but he saw these imperfections theologically, as part of a divine order.

² The first published volume was actually number eleven in the whole series, and began the publication of the letters of Newman's Catholic period; it was entitled *Littlemore to Rome*. The Catholic letters were completed with the publication of volume thirty-one. Publication of the Anglican letters started with volume one, *Ealing, Trinity, Oriel*, ed. Ian Ker and Thomas Gornall, in 1978.

³ D. Fenton, 'Interpretations of Catholic History', in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, April 1982, pp. 264-5. The *Journal* was started in 1950 to fill an obvious professional gap; for many years it was edited by Professor C.W. Dugmore. The Ecclesiastical History Society was formed some years later and has now published nearly twenty volumes of *Studies in Church History*, containing papers given at the Society's annual Conference. The *Journal* and the *Studies* are evidence of the liveliness of 'church history' in the past twenty years.

⁴ K. Thomas, op. cit., p. 87.

⁵ See also Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs* (1979): Capp thought that after the Reformation, astrologers supplied a need unsatisfied by Anglicanism, 'the harnessing of supernatural powers to help men avert dangers' etc. The golden age of the almanac was 1640 to 1700. Equally interesting, but much less influenced by Thomas, is *Popular Religion in Restoration England*, by J.C. Sommerville (Florida, 1977), which was based on best-selling devotional works published between 1660 and 1711. In both cases the social science technique has its limits, but the approach suggests results, as when Sommerville concludes that the allegedly 'puritan' line on sex usually appears in 'anglican' best-sellers.

⁷ Rosemary O'Day has also recently published *The English Clergy: the Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979); and Felicity Heal has published *Of Prelates and Princes: a study of the economic and social position of the Tudor episcopate*, (1980).

⁸ Halévy originally advanced his views in an essay, 'La Naissance de Methodisme', published in the *Revue de Paris* in 1906, and translated and published by Bernard Semmel as *The Birth of Methodism* (Chicago, 1971). Halévy's essay was partly given over to the troubles in the woollen industry in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire in the earlier eighteenth century. Most of the argument seems to me very implausible.

⁹ Thompson relied on G.R. Taylor, *The Angel-Makers* (1958) for this.

¹⁰ For *Southern History* readers, the Southcottians are interesting because of their West country connexions, and so are the Brethren, who do not come into the books mentioned above. The best introduction to their history is in *The Roots of Fundamentalism, British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago, 1970), by E.R. Sandeen, while H. Rowdon (*The Origins of the Brethren*, 1967) discussed the work of Robert Chapan at Barnstaple, Robert Gribble in Devon and Somerset, and George Brealey in the Black Down Hills, all in the first half of the nineteenth century. As for Methodist West Country sect-life, see also *The Shearers and the Shorn*, by E.W. Martin (1965), which is a sociological and historical study of the Okehampton area in the same period. Bristol University is now helping to publish material on the Bible Christians in Somerset.

¹¹ Obelkevich, *Op.cit.*, pp. 261–62.

¹² Obelkevich, *Op.cit.*, p. 311.

¹³ This prompted the comment: 'And when the farmers became a class, with their own class values, they rejected traditional moral values, shattering the traditional moral consensus', (p. 312), for example.

¹⁴ Ward, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, April 1971, p. 160.

¹⁵ T. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (ET 1967), p. 30. Marxist sociologists commonly hold that church-oriented groups in Western society are peripheral to the structure of modern society.

¹⁶ E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (1979), p. 232.

¹⁷ Michael Watts's *The Dissenters* (1978) ends at the French Revolution.

¹⁸ Two recent articles deserve notice: 'Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality', by D. Hilliard, *Victorian Studies*, Winter 1982; and 'The Last Victorian Anti-Ritualist Campaign, 1895–1906', G.I.T. Machin, *Victorian Studies*, Spring, 1982.

¹⁹ Bentley, *Op.cit.*, p. 128.

²⁰ Kent, *Holding the Fort*, pp. 236–94, 'Anglo-Catholic Revivalism'. The extent to which Anglo-Catholicism still dominates the image of the recent Anglican past may be seen in another recent book, which set out to harness 'church history' and sociology, and failed partly for that reason. This was: *A Social History of the Diocese of Newcastle*, edited by W.S.F. Pickering (1981), intended as a centenary volume for a diocese started in the 1880s. Some contributions still reflected how much Anglo-Catholicism resented opposition to its claims. What was even clearer, however, was that this diocese, set up at the peak of the Victorian movement to reform the Establishment, never took off — the story is one of gradual decay, speeding up from the mid-twentieth century. This narrative of decline has to be written into the myth before a fresh understanding of 'the Victorian Church' can form.

²¹ Obelkevich would be in this list, but I have already mentioned his work. McLeod's book is about London, Stephen Yeo's about Reading; Marxism influences Maclaren and Yeo, but not the others; Susan Budd's *Sociologists and Religion* (1973) is also valuable.

²² Thompson, *Op.cit.*, p. 45.

²³ Thompson, *Op.cit.*, p. 49.