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Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories and the Opposition to the Oxford Movement

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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*The endurance of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories exemplifies the continuing sociopolitical and cultural resonance of conspiracism. One particularly elucidatory case study that documents how anti-Catholic conspiracy theories function can be found in the opposition to the Oxford Movement in nineteenth century Britain. This thesis documents how anti-Catholic conspiracy theories emerged from being only a marginal presence in the early opposition to the Oxford Movement to becoming a core feature of later opposition efforts. It further argues that the rise of ultra-Protestantism in England and Scotland during the mid-to-late Victorian era was the most important catalyst of this transformation. Ultra-Protestantism's vehement anti-Catholicism and distinctive proclivity for conspiratorial thinking coalesced in its prolific diffusion of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories. Consequently, as ultra-Protestants became the most vocal antagonists of the Oxford Movement, they did so while wielding anti-Catholic conspiracy theories as a principal polemical strategy. When a second wave of opposition to the Oxford Movement erupted in the 1890s amidst the ecclesiastical and political controversy of the Great Church Crisis, it thus did so with anti-Catholic conspiracism as its galvanizing concern. The most significant moment of this event was the publication of Walter Walsh's 1897 monograph *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*. Walsh's work both exemplified the pervasive ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracism that precipitated it and embodied the culmination of this oeuvre as its most impactful permutation. By locating Walsh within his ultra-Protestant background, this thesis shows how *The Secret History* draws upon an extensive milieu of ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracism. The success of Walsh's book thus catapulted the distinctive conspiratorial polemic of ultra-Protestantism to a place of unprecedented prominence at the end of the nineteenth century. Its enormous influence therefore underlines the endurance of a politically potent popular anti-Catholicism often overlooked in the historiography of British anti-Catholicism. Within this tradition, ultra-Protestantism profoundly transformed the opposition to the Oxford Movement by amplifying the stature of anti-Catholic conspiracism across Britain's sociopolitical landscape.*

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Introduction

The endurance and practical impact of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories in the modern history of the English-speaking world exemplifies the continuing sociopolitical and cultural resonance of conspiracism. One particularly elucidatory case study that documents how anti-Catholic conspiracy theories operate rhetorically and politically is the opposition to the Oxford Movement in nineteenth century Britain. Anti-Catholic conspiracy theories were but a marginal presence in the early instantiations of this opposition, which rather emphasized doctrinal and ecclesiastical critiques against the high church movement. However, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a collection of ultra-Protestant figures and organizations began to occupy an increasingly substantial contingent of the opposition to the Oxford Movement. Ultra-Protestantism's vehement anti-Catholicism and distinctive proclivity for conspiratorial thinking coalesced in its prolific diffusion of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories. Consequently, ultra-Protestants became the most vocal antagonists of the Oxford Movement while wielding anti-Catholic conspiracy theories as a principal polemical strategy. When a second wave of opposition to the Oxford Movement erupted in the 1890s amidst an ecclesiastical and political controversy known as the Great Church Crisis, it thus did so not with doctrine as its driving issue, but anti-Catholic conspiracism. Ultra-Protestantism's foregrounding of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories therefore fundamentally transformed the opposition to the Oxford Movement. In doing so, it amplified the influence of anti-Catholic conspiracism to significant effect within Britain's sociopolitical landscape.

The Oxford Movement was an Anglican high church movement that has been traditionally dated from 1833 to 1845. Its primary assertion was that the established Church of

England “was a branch of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and not merely a creation of the Tudor state at the Reformation.”¹ Apostolic succession, the derivation of doctrinal truth from ecclesiastical tradition, and the centrality of the sacraments thus constitute the core priorities championed by supporters of the Oxford Movement.² These ideals were defined in a series of ninety “Tracts for the Times,” leading adherents to become known as Tractarians. Following its decline, marked by the conversion of several leading Tractarians to Roman Catholicism, the legacy of the Oxford Movement persisted in Ritualism, which adapted Tractarian beliefs to liturgical practices, and the development of Anglo-Catholicism. Some distinctions identified by modern historians will be discussed in chapter two. However, this thesis will otherwise treat the Oxford Movement, Ritualism, and Anglo-Catholicism as interchangeable. This is in accordance with the common practice of nineteenth-century observers who perceived these movements to represent one continuous tradition. The anti-Catholic conspiracy theories deployed against the Oxford Movement thus equally implicated Ritualism and Anglo-Catholicism for opponents saw no need to differentiate these targets.

Anti-Catholic sentiment propelled the conspiracy theories used to assail the Oxford Movement. This anti-Catholicism had deep roots in Britain dating back to the Reformation. John Wolffe thus notes that “the Oxford Movement and the ritualist movement that flowed from it were not the initial stimulus for anti-Catholicism.”³ However, Wolffe also rightly contends that hostility towards the Oxford Movement was instrumental in sustaining anti-Catholicism

¹ Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World, 1830-1930*, edited by Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

² Ibid.

³ John Wolffe, “Anti-Catholicism,” in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, Volume IV: Building Identity, 1830-1913*, edited by Carmen M. Mangion and Susan O’Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 198.

“across the whole of the nineteenth century.”⁴ Ultra-Protestantism, as the most militant and active anti-Catholic force during the latter half of the nineteenth century, was chiefly responsible for this dynamic. Its conspiratorial polemic, marked by anxieties regarding Catholic political ambitions and subversive Tractarian collaborators, thus came to define the intertwined discourse of British anti-Catholicism and anti-Tractarianism.

This thesis is structured to document the process by which this transformation in the opposition to the Oxford Movement occurred. The first chapter will discuss the initial opposition to the Oxford Movement. It will outline the three presiding categories of Tractarianism that early critics attacked, its doctrine, its conception of Anglican identity, and its intentions, while emphasizing doctrinal issues as their prevailing concern. The second chapter provides essential context for ultra-Protestantism and the anti-Catholic conspiracy theories it proliferated. Three such areas will be addressed: the emergence of Ritualism and its location in the legacy of the Oxford Movement, the contours of British anti-Catholicism in the mid-Victorian era, and the extensive tradition of anti-Jesuit conspiracy theories in British history. With this backdrop in place, the third chapter covers the history of ultra-Protestantism with a specific attentiveness towards its distinctive penchant for conspiracism. Over the course of this chapter, the consistent conspiratorial style of ultra-Protestant rhetoric is traced through the end of the nineteenth century to its formative role in the Great Church Crisis. The chapter also highlights Walter Walsh’s *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* as the culmination of ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracism in the opposition to the Oxford Movement.

Walsh’s best-selling book exemplifies the convergence of anti-Catholic and anti-Tractarian conspiracy theories facilitated by ultra-Protestant polemic. Its enormous influence

⁴ Ibid.

further underlines the persisting popular resonance of anti-Catholic conspiracism in late nineteenth century Britain. Although the success of Walsh's work and its importance in instigating the Great Church Crisis have been cursorily noted by historians, Walsh's place in the ultra-Protestant opposition to the Oxford Movement and in the history of anti-Catholic conspiracism has been understudied. Previous histories of Walsh begin in 1897 with the publication of *The Secret History*.⁵ This thesis instead situates Walsh within his ultra-Protestant background to illustrate how he draws upon an unexamined milieu of anti-Catholic conspiracism before explicating his work as the denouement of ultra-Protestantism's transformation of the opposition to the Oxford Movement.

The impact of Walsh's conspiracy theory and the continuing prominence of ultra-Protestantism through the Great Church Crisis also demonstrates the endurance of a politically potent popular anti-Catholicism too often overlooked in the historiography of British anti-Catholicism. This historiography proffers a declension narrative that can obfuscate the position of anti-Catholicism as a stubbornly prevalent sociopolitical and cultural force in late nineteenth century Britain. Arguments that anti-Catholicism faced a precipitous decline during the latter half of the nineteenth century are usually supported by two points: the failure to pass anti-Catholic legislation and the marginalization of anti-Catholic activity.⁶ These are both reasonable observations that require some measure of nuance. For example, correlating the nonviability of anti-Catholic legislation on a national scale to a general sociocultural decline in anti-Catholicism

⁵ Bethany Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis and the End of English Erastianism, 1898-1906* (London: Routledge, 2017); Martin Wellings, "The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect: R.W. Church, J.H. Rigg, and Walter Walsh," *Studies in Church History* 33 (1997): 501-515.

⁶ D.G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 114, 174; Steve Bruce, Tony Glendinning, Iain Paterson, and Michael Rosie, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 15-22; Martin J. Mitchell, "Anti-Catholicism and the Scottish Middle Class 1800-1914," in *Anti-Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, 1600-2000: Practices, Representations and Ideas*, edited by Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille and Geraldine Vaughan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 225.

encounters the issue of oversimplification. As Miriam Burstein explains, “the rhythms of anti-Catholic sentiment in the wider culture, of course, did not neatly follow those of anti-Catholic sentiment in high politics.”⁷ A well-documented example of anti-Catholicism’s resilience in British culture is the voluminous output of anti-Catholic fiction that continued with success into the twentieth century.⁸ Additionally, though anti-Catholic organization was, to some extent, marginalized in mainstream institutions, this did not prevent ultra-Protestant and anti-Catholic agitators from being able to influence political and ecclesiastical affairs from those margins, as subsequent chapters will indicate.

An association between anti-Tractarianism and anti-Catholicism also needs to be asserted to recognize the full extent of anti-Catholic activity that remained through the end of the nineteenth century. As Wolffe contends, “even in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century,” ultra-Protestantism and anti-Catholicism were “still sustained by anti-ritualist agitation” and “enjoyed considerable political and cultural importance” in several communities.⁹ The deployment of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories by the opposition to the Oxford Movement provides an especially effective device for making this connection clear. These anti-Catholic conspiracy theories reached a large audience through a controversy that engaged both political and ecclesiastical leaders in a contentious discourse on the legacy of the Oxford movement. The influence of ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracy theories on the opposition to the Oxford Movement and the broader sociopolitical landscape of late nineteenth century Britain makes it

⁷ Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, “Anti-Catholic Sermons in Victorian Britain,” in *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by Robert Ellison (Leiden: Brill, 2010),

⁸ Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Bethany Kilcrease, “Radical Anti-Catholic Protestantism and *When it was Dark*: The Novel and the Historical Context,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 57 (2014): 210-230.

⁹ John Wolffe, “A Transatlantic Perspective: Protestantism and National Identities in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States,” in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850*, edited by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 292.

imperative that we understand their development. Such an inquiry also promises deeper insights into the nature of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories and their ability to consequentially shape political and cultural environments.

Chapter One – The Early Opposition to the Oxford Movement

Introduction

Although conspiratorial rhetoric was deployed by critics of the Oxford Movement from its inception, during its initial phase from 1833 to 1845, opposition efforts emphasized matters of doctrine while anti-Catholic conspiracy theories were relegated to an extraneous fringe. However, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, by the end of the nineteenth century, this centrality of doctrine had been gradually displaced by the proliferation of anti-Catholic and anti-Tractarian conspiracy theories. The origins of these elements, the doctrinal and the conspiratorial, are located in the initial wave of opposition to the Oxford Movement. A study of this early dissent will thus elucidate the threads that recur in its later instantiations, if in different degrees of significance. This endeavor also illustrates the formative role played by a permeative anti-Catholicism in the reception of the Oxford Movement.

Opposition to the Oxford Movement was fierce from its genesis to its decline, traditionally dated from John Keble's Assize Sermon, preached in 1833, to John Henry Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845. Early critics levied a vast array of grievances against the Tractarians that can be sorted into three thematic categories, listed in descending order of prominence: doctrinal concerns, the identity of the Church of England, particularly with regard to the Reformation, and questions about Tractarian intentions. Interwoven with each category is the ever-present issue of politics. Though not often explicitly foregrounded by its opponents, the immediate political background of the Oxford Movement is notable, marked by a "constitutional revolution" comprised of the Sacramental Test Act (1828), the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829), and the Reform Act (1832), which collectively expanded

civil rights for British Catholics.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the Oxford Movement's contemporary opposition can be thoroughly outlined through the three categories of doctrine, identity, and intentions.

Doctrinal Objections to the Oxford Movement

Doctrinal disagreements emerge as the most prominent and defining feature of the initial reaction to the Oxford Movement. These doctrinal disputes, Andrew Atherstone observes, rehashed “the Protestant-Catholic controversies of the Reformation,” focusing on the authority of Scripture and tradition, sacramental theology, justification, and the nature of the church and the priesthood.¹¹ From the outset, Tractarians found even their most fundamental doctrinal convictions under attack. This is well demonstrated by Newman's dalliance as a correspondent with the *Record*, described by Josef Altholz as “the most virulently partisan organ of Anglican Evangelicalism,” discussing a central doctrinal tenet of the Oxford Movement: Apostolic Succession.¹²

Newman hoped that a commitment to “a revival of Church discipline” through the empowerment of bishops might help establish common ground between the Tractarians, whose leaders preferred the moniker “Apostolicals,” and the evangelical readership of the *Record*.¹³ To accomplish this, Newman authored several contributions to the *Record* to support concomitant Tract publications in 1833. Alongside his appendix to Tract 8 advocating for the practice of

¹⁰ Nicholas Dixon, “The Church of England and the Legislative Reforms of 1828-32: Revolution or Adjustment?,” *Studies in Church History* 56 (2020): 401-418.

¹¹ Andrew Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions: Oxford (1838-1846),” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, edited by Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles, and James Pereiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 166.

¹² Josef L. Altholz, “Newman and the *Record*, 1828-1833,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 32 (1999): 160. Note: Anglican Evangelicalism here refers to evangelicals who remained within and committed to the Church of England in contrast to Evangelical Dissenters, those evangelicals who left the Anglican Church outright.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

excommunication, for instance, Newman sent a piece to the *Record*, cunningly composed with “evangelical jargon,” urging “godly discipline” for the “flagrantly wicked” through the restoration of excommunication for “open sinners.”¹⁴ This practice would be administered by the bishops, thus empowered by virtue of an enhanced sense of Apostolic Succession. In time, Newman’s connection to the Tracts would be discerned by Alexander Haldane, the editor of the *Record*. Despite his respect for Newman, Haldane subsequently published a harsh rebuke of Newman’s position in the December 1833 edition, declaring his emphasis on Apostolic Succession “unscriptural and offensive” and thereby thwarting Newman’s aspirations of wooing evangelical support.¹⁵

As documented by Peter Toon, Anglican Evangelicals would instead become the Oxford Movement’s most prolific enemies, publishing a vast body of work warning of Tractarian “heresies” and clashing over areas of doctrine regarding “the Rule of Faith, Justification, and the Church, Ministry and Sacraments.”¹⁶ The Episcopal bishop Charles M’Ilvaine’s monograph on justification, for instance, makes an extensive case against the Oxford Movement’s soteriology and sacramental theology.¹⁷ In it, the bishop condemns the Tractarian position on justification as one that neglects “the inward work of religion” by making “the whole business of salvation consist in external observances.”¹⁸ M’Ilvaine subsequently determines the Tractarian doctrine of salvation to be “precisely the doctrine” espoused by the Council of Trent, “that Baptism is ‘*the only instrumental cause*’ of Justification,” before further implicating Tractarian sacramental

¹⁴ Ibid, 161.

¹⁵ Ibid, 163.

¹⁶ Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 3.

¹⁷ Charles Pettit M’Ilvaine, *Oxford Divinity Compared with that of the Romish and Anglican Churches with a Special View to the Illustration of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Philadelphia: Joseph Whetham & Son, 1841).

¹⁸ Ibid, 212.

theology as sharing the same suppositions that uphold the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁹

A similarly fierce and comprehensive defense of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is given by evangelical leader William Goode's *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*.²⁰ Goode writes that the "Holy Scripture is the sole divine Rule of faith and practice to the conscience of every individual."²¹ He then proceeds to contrast this position against the Oxford Movement's elevation of tradition, repudiated by Goode with the now familiar characterization that it essentially mimics the Roman Catholic approach.²²

Doctrinal opposition to the Oxford Movement extended well beyond the evangelical sphere to include a broad spectrum of Anglican leaders who produced an extensive selection of polemical and theological texts against the Tractarians. Perhaps the most noteworthy contingent of Oxford Movement detractors was a group of High Churchmen who might otherwise have been sympathetic to much of the Tractarian program. Against the "misconception" that the Tractarians were the "true heirs of the High Church tradition in the Church of England," Peter Nockles' *The Oxford Movement in context* aptly delineates the Oxford Movement and established High Church Anglicanism as distinct phenomena.²³ Nockles identifies several areas of doctrinal discrepancies encompassing ecclesiology, particularly with regard to Apostolic Succession, liturgical paradigms, and soteriology.²⁴ That high church bishops feature prominently alongside evangelical bishops in W.S. Bricknell's *The Judgement of the Bishops upon Tractarian Theology*, among the most comprehensive collections of anti-Tractarian doctrinal polemic, should thus

¹⁹ Ibid, 213; 218.

²⁰ William Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1842).

²¹ Ibid, 1.

²² Ibid.

²³ Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.

²⁴ Ibid, 146; 184; 228.

come as little surprise.²⁵ Bricknell's work compiled doctrinal "charges" detailed by Anglican bishops between 1837 and 1842 on a host of theological topics divided into twenty-six thematic chapters. The resulting anthology culminates with the claim that Tractarian doctrine represents a "revival of Popish doctrines and practices."²⁶

The most frequent charge levied against the Oxford Movement was consequently that Tractarian doctrine exuded "Popery," that it espoused Roman Catholic doctrine incommensurate with Anglicanism. Such allegations were proclaimed immediately following the first Tracts. In 1833, the *Christian Observer* lamented the proliferation of publications that engaged in "bigotry, Popery, and intolerance."²⁷ A year later, a correspondent of the same publication declared that "the decrees of the Council of Trent... are not more undisguisedly Popish than these Oxford Tracts in the year 1834."²⁸

This point is strongly stated by G.S. Faber, who accused the Tractarians of exhibiting an "almost undisguised tendency to the miserable corruptions and superstitions of Popery."²⁹ Faber justifies his rhetoric with a doctrinal argument, writing of the Tractarians wish to establish "Tradition... as a *second* Rule of Faith," one *unsanctioned* by our sole Binding Rule of Faith the Bible."³⁰ To underscore the threat, Faber warns that once "the broadly distinct line of Scripture alone" is passed, "it will be found impossible *consistently* to stop short, until we receive all the

²⁵ W. Simcox Bricknell, *The Judgement of the Bishops upon Tractarian Theology* (Oxford: J. Vincent Simpkin and Marahsll, 1845).

²⁶ Ibid, 507.

²⁷ Quoted in Atherstone, "Protestant Reactions," 166.

²⁸ *The Christian Observer: Conducted by Members of the Established Church for the Year 1834* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1834), 186.

²⁹ G. Stanley Faber, *Provincial Letters from the County-Palatine of Durham: Exhibiting the Nature and Tendency of the Principles put forth by the Writers of the Tracts for the Times, and their Various Allied and Associates* (London: William Edward Painter, 1842), vii.

³⁰ Ibid, vii-viii.

Decisions of Trent.”³¹ This reasoning leads Faber to conclude that “our first step off the Bible is on to Popery.”³²

The Oxford Movement and the Identity of the Church of England

The association between the Oxford Movement and Roman Catholicism placed the Tractarians on a collision course with Anglicans who wished to identify the Church of England as a Protestant church. Tractarians suggested the need for a “Second Reformation” in a more Catholic direction and Evangelical Dissenters responded by calling for a “re-reformation.”³³ Disdain for the Reformation was hardly subtle in Tractarian writings. In a letter to Edward Pusey, John Keble wrote that “anything which separates the present Church from the Reformers I should hail as a great good.”³⁴ This sentiment was more bluntly expressed in Hurrell Froude’s *Remains*, posthumously published by Newman and Keble. While maintaining that “I never could be a Romanist,” Froude describes the Reformation as “a limb badly set” that “must be broken again in order to be righted.”³⁵ In case there was any room for confusion, Froude makes certain his views of the Reformation are made explicit by stating that “I hate the Reformation and the Reformers” before denoting their “rationalist spirit” as the false prophet “of the Revelations.”³⁶ On the other side, Dissenting, that is non-Anglican, Evangelicals saw the Oxford Movement as demonstrative of the English Reformation’s incompleteness. Already critical of the Church of England for failing to realize the Reformation’s promise of “religious liberty,” these evangelical voices identified the presence of the Tractarians, a “popish” element harbored

³¹ Ibid, viii.

³² Ibid.

³³ Peter Nockles, “The Reformation Revised? The Contested Reception of the English Reformation in Nineteenth-Century Protestantism,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 90 (2014): 243.

³⁴ Quoted in Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions,” 167.

³⁵ R.H. Froude, *Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude*, Vol. 1 (London: Gilbert & Rivington, Printers, 1838), 433-434.

³⁶ Ibid, 389.

by an ostensibly Protestant church, to be further evidence that the Anglican Church was only “half-reformed.”³⁷

Caught in the middle between the Tractarians and the Dissenting Evangelicals, Anglican Evangelicals and moderate High Churchmen felt a pressing need to defend the Anglican Church’s Reformation pedigree against both extremes. The resulting interfactional coalition subsequently launched an aggressive campaign to uphold the Protestant identity of the Church of England as unassailable. Notable products of this effort include the 1840 foundation of the Parker Society and the 1838-1839 erection of a memorial in Oxford to Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley. Both were direct responses to the Tractarians’ denigration of the Anglican Church’s Reformation character.³⁸ The Parker Society was tasked with republishing the writings of the English Reformers while the memorial was speculated to be “a protest against Froude’s ‘Remains’” and a general “expression of hostility to the Oxford writers.”³⁹ Such initiatives sought to strengthen a sense of Protestant identity within the Church of England that could then be weaponized against the Tractarians.

This program to emphasize the Protestant identity of the Church of England drew upon two politically and historically powerful narratives: Protestantism as an indispensable hallmark of England’s national character and a related tradition of anti-Catholicism. That the Oxford memorial enshrined Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, three martyrs of the English Reformation, was no mistake. Contemporary to the conception of the Martyrs’ Memorial, nationwide celebrations of the Reformation’s tercentenary were marked by the release of a complete republished edition of John Foxe’s *Acts and monuments*, better recognized as the *Book of*

³⁷ Nockles, “The Reformation Revised?,” 238; 243-244.

³⁸ Ibid, 238.

³⁹ Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions,” 167-168.

Martyrs.⁴⁰ Foxe's sixteenth century martyrology, which chronicled the persecution of Protestants under the Catholic Queen Mary (r.1553-1558), became a galvanizing instrument for the advancement of a historical narrative proclaiming Protestantism to be an indelible feature of England's national identity.⁴¹

While many Tractarians believed the Martyrs' Memorial to be an antagonistic statement against the Oxford Movement, Atherstone contends that "the chief motivation for many in supporting the memorial was as a protest against Roman Catholic expansion."⁴² Such anti-Catholic sentiment had deep roots as a catalyst for "shaping and evolving British national identity" on the basis of a dichotomy between an independent Protestant state and Roman Catholic authority.⁴³ As Linda Colley affirms, many Britons "quite consciously" prided themselves on "being part of a native tradition of resistance to Catholicism."⁴⁴ Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* operated as a foundational work for this tradition from the sixteenth century onward, one that "helped link Catholicism in the minds of subsequent generations of Britons with religious persecution, foreign interference, and arbitrary government."⁴⁵

By extension of this historical narrative, perceiving the Martyr's Memorial to be a gesture of anti-Catholicism becomes an intuitive step; one that an article published in the *Oxford Herald* took in 1838.⁴⁶ Heralding the commemoration of the "heroic deaths" of Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, "three Protestant martyrs," the article praises the memorial on behalf of "the grateful memory of the Protestant people of Great Britain."⁴⁷ It touts the memorial as an appropriate

⁴⁰ Andrew Atherstone, "The Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (2003): 284.

⁴¹ Nockles, "The Reformation Revised?," 231-232.

⁴² Atherstone, "The Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford," 282-284.

⁴³ Nockles, "The Reformation Revised?," 232.

⁴⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 330.

⁴⁵ Nockles, "The Reformation Revised?," 232.

⁴⁶ "Bishops Cranmer, Latimer, & Ridley," *Oxford Herald*, December 1, 1838.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

symbol for a moment of “eager patriotism” and lauds its supporters as “ever-sincere Protestants” who “cannot withhold any practicable manifestation of their affection and reverence for that pure and holy religion which the Reformation established in Great Britain.”⁴⁸

The author then shifts to a more dire tone steeped in anti-Catholic alarmism. Warning of a present “propagation of Popery,” noted as “the dark and savage superstition which tied Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer to the stake,” the article declares that “the Popery of England, under the guidance of the Jesuits, is secretly strengthening its sympathies” and rapidly progressing towards “an extended conspiracy... against Protestantism.”⁴⁹ As “the faithful and fearless Protestants of England and Scotland” are “destined” to be the last line of defense against these Catholic schemes, the author is thus grateful for the memorial, the message it delivers, and hopes that it will “evoke a prompt and suitable response.”⁵⁰

The degree to which the author of this article implicates the Oxford Movement in the perceived advance of Roman Catholicism in Britain is unclear. Nevertheless, that anti-Catholicism and anti-Tractarianism were “closely interwoven” is indisputable.⁵¹ Accusations that the Oxford Movement’s doctrinal commitments pulled the church in a Catholic direction, combined with the open contempt that many Tractarians’ expressed for the Reformation, led exponents of the Anglican Church’s Protestant identity to treat the Oxford Movement with considerable suspicion. This positioned the Tractarians amongst the most scrutinized antagonists in the question of the Anglican Church’s identity. As a correspondent remarked of a leading

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions.” 167.

Tractarian figure in the *Church and State Gazette*, “it is almost difficult to say what Dr. Pusey does hold in common with the English Church, *except his canonry*.”⁵²

Questions Regarding the Intentions of the Oxford Movement

As anti-Catholicism thus emerges as a prominent motif in the two categories of doctrine and identity, so too is it central in the third feature of the Oxford Movement’s opposition:

questions of intention arising from the Oxford Movement’s catholicizing tendencies.

Encapsulating this concern, Charles Golightly, one of the most prolific anti-Oxford Movement polemicists, insinuated that many Tractarians duplicitously “hoisted the flag of Anglicanism” while fighting under “false colours,” advancing the charge that they were “in heart and spirit Roman Catholics.”⁵³ As we have seen, accusations of this kind were often doctrinal in nature, with opponents labelling Tractarian positions as “popery.” However, in rarer instances, critics proposed that the true objective of the Oxford Movement was to facilitate a reunion between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. William Palmer’s *A Narrative of Events* offers an example.⁵⁴ Although the work defends the “romanizing tendency” of the Oxford Movement as merely the advocacy of certain Catholic doctrines and practices, Palmer articulates his fear that some radical members of the Oxford Movement “are secretly convinced of the duty of uniting themselves to Rome.”⁵⁵

Many such doubts regarding the intentions of the Tractarians were provoked by the 1841 publication of Newman’s *Tract 90*, which precipitated the Oxford Movement’s greatest controversy. In *Tract 90*, Newman argues that the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, a collection

⁵² Quoted in *Ibid*, 173.

⁵³ Quoted in *Ibid*, 175.

⁵⁴ William Palmer, *A Narrative of Events Connected with the Publication of the Tracts for the Times: With Reflections on Existing Tendencies to Romanism, and on the Present Duties and Prospects of Members of the Church* (Oxford and London, 1843).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 34-35, 58.

of doctrinal statements that constitute the accepted essentials of the Anglican faith, are fully commensurate with Roman Catholicism. There is nothing, Newman contends to begin the work, “in the Articles propositions or terms inconsistent with the Catholic faith.”⁵⁶ The tract then proceeds to address twelve separate doctrinal and ecclesiological categories that encompass the Thirty-Nine Articles, reinterpreting each “in a sense compatible with Tridentine Catholicism.”⁵⁷

The outcry that followed the publication of *Tract 90* was swift and fierce. Opponents of the Oxford Movement found their suspicions and their charges of “popery” vindicated. Doctrinally, the most inflammatory aspect of *Tract 90* was Newman’s recurring insistence that an “Article gains a witness and concurrence from the Council of Trent,” echoing a common refrain of the Oxford Movement’s detractors.⁵⁸ Golightly referred to Newman’s “favorable mention of the Council of Trent” as his most “alarming” proposition, one indicative of a broader apologetic for Catholic doctrine.⁵⁹ Were the principles espoused by Newman in *Tract 90* to prevail, Golightly warned, “we may have all doctrine preached in our pulpits, but that which is scriptural, catholic, and true.”⁶⁰

Tract 90 additionally challenged the Church of England’s Protestant identity. The “Four Tutors” of Oxford declared Newman’s work to be “highly dangerous” for its minimization of “the very serious differences which separate the Church of Rome from our own.”⁶¹ Utilizing the imagery of historical narrative, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, the editor of the *Protestant Magazine*, accused Newman of desecrating “the charred ashes of Latimer and Ridley” and leading his

⁵⁶ John Henry Newman, *Tract Number Ninety: Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* (New York: H.B. Durand, 1865), 5.

⁵⁷ Jeremy Morris, *The High Church Revival in the Church of England: Arguments and Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3.

⁵⁸ Newman, *Tract Number Ninety*, 67.

⁵⁹ Charles P. Golightly, *New and Strange Doctrines Extracted from the Writings of Mr. Newman and his Friends* (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1841), 19-20.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions,” 170-171.

⁶¹ Quoted in *Ibid*, 170.

readers towards the “murderous embrace” of the Catholic Church, named as the “Great Harlot” of Revelation.⁶²

The most novel, and often extreme, reactions to Newman’s *Tract 90* resonate with the third feature of opposition: questioning the intentions of the Oxford Movement. Newman’s own intentions for writing *Tract 90* continue to be debated. Even after his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, a move instigated by the fallout over *Tract 90*, Newman “vigorously and consistently denied” any suggestion that *Tract 90* was “a veiled apologetic” for Catholicism.⁶³ Nonetheless, Michael Pahls and Kenneth Parker opine that Newman’s vision of Anglican catholicity, which they document as an iteration of the Caroline divines, remained one “that was open to reunion with the Church of Rome.”⁶⁴ This conclusion is drawn with a caution reminiscent of Palmer’s similar position that some Tractarians sought communion with Rome.

At their most dramatic, accusations that the Oxford Movement harbored duplicitous intentions adopted “sixteenth-century anti-Catholic polemic with alarmist tales of ‘Jesuits in disguise.’”⁶⁵ We have previously discussed one example of such rhetoric with the *Oxford Herald* article and its warnings that the “Popery of England, under the guidance of the Jesuits,” was conspiring against British Protestantism.⁶⁶ This article yet contained no direct reference to the Oxford Movement. Other examples make comparable accusations that do implicate the Tractarians, but such overt use of conspiratorial language is quite rare. One example of this can be seen in a sermon preached by Francis Close. During the sermon, Close laments that “Papists

⁶² Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶³ Michael J.G. Pahls and Kenneth Parker, “Tract 90: Newman’s Last Stand or a Bold New Venture?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, edited by Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles, and James Pereiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 305.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁶⁵ Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions,” 176.

⁶⁶ *Oxford Herald*, Dec. 1, 1838.

and semi-papists are disseminating their subtle errors through the length and breadth of the land,” adding that “while I am even now speaking several victims of Oxford Tractarianism have been offered up on the shrine of Popery.”⁶⁷ Close thus accuses the Tractarians, alongside other elements of the Anglican Church, of inspiring conversions to Catholicism.⁶⁸ However, unlike the *Oxford Herald* article, Close stops short of invoking a conspiracy orchestrated by the Roman Catholic Church or implemented by Catholic agents.

Such suppositions were as often mocked as they were postulated. Another correspondent to the *Oxford Herald* wrote in 1843 that Protestant readers need not fear “the dagger of Jesuits from St. Oscott’s” nor “feel any anxiety about the probability of a Guy Fawkes conspiracy to blow up the next meeting of Convocation.”⁶⁹ A bizarre incident occurred in 1845 that further aroused Protestant suspicions. It began with the September edition of a Tractarian-aligned journal, *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*, and its inclusion of an article defending the Jesuits.⁷⁰

The piece was innocuous enough; an anonymous author reviewing a history of the Jesuit order authored by the French historian J. Cretineau Joly. Its effusive praise for the Jesuits yet betrays any sense of subtlety or analytic indifference. By its conclusion, the article becomes a celebration of the Jesuits, summarizing the order as “intellectual always; considerable in science, eminent in literature, conspicuous in morality, sublime in their hope, their charity, and their faith.”⁷¹ Though but a section of the Catholic Church, the article continues, the Jesuits count among their number “more distinguished ecclesiastics than have appeared in all the opposing

⁶⁷ Francis Close, *The Restoration of Churches is the Restoration of Popery: Proved and Illustrated from the Authenticated Publications of the “Cambridge Camden Society”* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1844), 24-25.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 25.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Atherstone, “Protestant Reactions,” 176.

⁷⁰ *The Oxford and Cambridge Review, for July...December, 1845* (London: William Pickering, 1845), 225-248.

⁷¹ Ibid, 248.

Protestant sects and schisms throughout the world.”⁷² From here, the article crescendos to its denouement, a final line pronouncing of the Jesuits “they are honourable on account of their friends, but on account of their enemies they are venerable.”⁷³ It thus comes as little surprise that soon after the article’s release, the author was discovered to be Miles Gerald Keon, a Roman Catholic alumnus of a Jesuit college, galivanting as a contributor to a Protestant publication.

Golightly was so incensed at the publication of “Romish writers in professedly Protestant reviews” that he sent not one, but two letters to *The Standard*.⁷⁴ The first was published on November 5th, 1845, in the same edition that announced the conversion of Newman to the Catholic Church.⁷⁵ After reminding the reader of his past warnings regarding the Oxford Movement, Golightly quotes a triumphal passage from the Roman Catholic *Tablet* celebrating Keon’s article for “appearing in a Protestant periodical, and therefore coming out under Protestant sanction, as a Protestant vindication of the great order founded by St. Ignatius.”⁷⁶ For this “miserable trickery,” Golightly smears the Tractarians, and those associated with them, for “holding one doctrine in words, and in practice upholding the opposite, confounding all distinctions of right and wrong.”⁷⁷ He concludes by calling on “Old England” to strongly “repudiate” any such demonstrations of “Jesuitism.”⁷⁸ Golightly’s second letter, published in the November 11th, 1845 edition of *The Standard*, responds to the editor of *The Oxford and*

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Charles P. Golightly, “Oxford and Stonyhurst – ‘The Oxford and Cambridge Review,’” *The Standard*, November 5, 1845.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Cambridge Review and the contents of Keon's article itself with a tone of righteous fury comparable to the first letter.⁷⁹

More interesting are the accompanying contributions from other correspondents featured in the same November 11th edition. From these, it becomes clear that the controversy had snowballed from a single instance of a Catholic authored article to a large-scale conspiracy implicating the Jesuit order alongside any parties with even a tenuous connection to *The Oxford and Cambridge Review* in a clandestine effort to promote Catholicism within the Church of England. Two former contributors to the *Oxford Magazine*, a periodical since absorbed by *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*, are referenced by name in *The Standard* as being involved in this plot. In one instance, S.J. Rigaud, defending himself against accusations that he was "engaged with members of a Jesuit college in propagating Romanism among young men," steadfastly maintains his commitment to denouncing "Romish error and doctrines calculated to lead to it" before vigorously denying any continuing relationship with the *Oxford and Cambridge Review*.⁸⁰ Another correspondent identifying as "a member of the University" writes of his dissatisfaction with a similar self-defense published elsewhere by Rev. Rawlinson, a Tutor of Exeter College facing similar accusations.⁸¹ The correspondent poses a blunt question: is "Mr. Rawlinson... a contributor, jointly with Mr. Keon of Stonyhurst, and others to the pages of the *Oxford and Cambridge Review* – Yes or No!"⁸² The clear insinuation is that any such connection would be incriminating.

⁷⁹ Charles P. Golightly, "Oxford and Stonyhurst – The Oxford and Cambridge Review," *The Standard*, November 11, 1845.

⁸⁰ *The Standard*, November 11, 1845.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Conclusion

Sensational as the conspiracy that cascaded from the controversy surrounding Keon's article was, it represented an exceptional occurrence for the opposition to the Oxford Movement between 1833 and 1845. During this period, critics of the Oxford Movement are better defined by their doctrinal preoccupations. Conspiratorial language, especially that implicating Roman Catholic involvement, was an extreme rarity. Nonetheless, the three categories of doctrine, identity, and intentions that together explicate the contours of the Oxford Movement's contemporary opposition were each accompanied by a pervasive anti-Catholic sentiment. This prejudice was exacerbated by the passage of the Roman Catholic Relief Act. However, as the next chapter will discuss, British anti-Catholicism was a deeply rooted sociocultural and political phenomenon that predated and outlasted the controversy of Catholic emancipation. Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, anti-Catholic ultra-Protestant movements thus amplified questions regarding the Tractarians' intentions. Consequently, the doctrinal emphasis of the initial opposition to the Oxford Movement that we have seen in this chapter would be gradually altered as ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracy theories emerged as a more central feature of anti-Tractarian polemic.

Chapter Two – The Context of Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories: Ritualism, British Anti-Catholicism, and Anti-Jesuitism

Introduction

While anti-Catholic conspiracism was deployed against the Oxford Movement from its inception, as discussed in the previous chapter, its shift from a fringe element of a more doctrinally driven opposition to a core feature of one that elevated issues of identity and related political concerns is only realized towards the end of the nineteenth century. As we shall see in the next chapter, this shift corresponded to the emergence of ultra-Protestantism as a principal force in the continuing opposition to the Oxford Movement. The proliferation of conspiracy theories by ultra-Protestant figures is an essential elucidatory dynamic of this transformation. However, before discussing ultra-Protestant conspiracism in the late nineteenth century, several interstitial developments require attention. These provide a necessary background for understanding the sociopolitical and religious landscape that shaped ultra-Protestantism; one that will be indispensable as an interpretive lexicon for ultra-Protestant writings and conspiracy theories in subsequent chapters.

This chapter will thus focus on three topics that aptly provide this context. First is the emergence of Ritualism. While historians have compellingly challenged the common perception that Ritualism was but a continuity of the Oxford Movement, most nineteenth century commentators, including the ultra-Protestants, understood Ritualism to be the heir apparent of Tractarianism and used the terms interchangeably. A brief review of Ritualism and its relationship to the Oxford Movement is thus needed to elaborate the religious context of these sources and their liberal use of the term. The second significant development is the further advancement of anti-Catholicism. As John Wolffe chronicles, the restoration of the Catholic

hierarchy in 1850 and the Vatican Council in 1870 exacerbated already acute anti-Catholic sentiment in Britain.⁸³ This milieu is important to detail as a fundamental galvanizing force for ultra-Protestantism, one that molded the conspiracism of its late nineteenth century iterations. Finally, to properly investigate the deployment of conspiracy theories against the Oxford Movement, we need to introduce an important thematic precursor: the prolific and distinctive tradition of Jesuit conspiracy theories. As we have seen with earlier examples, anti-Jesuitism was a profound historical and rhetorical influence on anti-Catholic conspiracism, including the content of anti-Oxford Movement conspiracies. Ultra-Protestants interwove the salient features of these Jesuit conspiracy theories into their own, which can thus be more richly analyzed with this formative context in place.

Ritualism

Although Newman's 1845 turn to Rome, alongside the concomitant conversions of a substantial contingent of leading Tractarians, provides historians with a canonical bookend date for the initial span of the Oxford Movement, history rarely conforms to the desires of the historian to classify it so neatly. Those nonetheless so inclined to this framework present mass Tractarian conversions to Roman Catholicism as the "catastrophic event" that wrought the collapse of the Oxford Movement.⁸⁴ Challenging this catastrophizing narrative, George Herring shows that conversions were instead viewed by many Tractarians as an opportunity to moderate the Oxford Movement by unloading "embarrassing neo-Roman baggage."⁸⁵ In practice then, while Newman's conversion did challenge the Oxford Movement's academic and ecclesiastical

⁸³ John Wolfe, "Anti-Catholicism," in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, Volume IV: Building Identity, 1830-1913*, edited by Carmen M. Mangion and Susan O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 191-208.

⁸⁴ See George Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice: The Tractarian Parochial Worlds from the 1830s to the 1870s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23-25, for a thorough historiographical overview of this position.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

credibility, its influence on the parochial level, Peter Nockles observes, “was only just beginning to make itself felt.”⁸⁶ Newman’s departure thus freed the Oxford Movement to pursue a more practical pastoral agenda in a re-energized appeal to local parishes. This was a successful enterprise. Herring’s statistical analysis of English parishes demonstrates that, while a minority, “from 1840-1870 Tractarianism was a consistently expanding phenomenon.”⁸⁷ Its hallmarks included a revival of the daily service and liturgical prayer, an emphasis on Eucharistic practice, and, most controversially, confession.⁸⁸ The most significant development to emerge in this milieu was Ritualism. However, the extent to which Ritualism and the Oxford Movement can be viewed synonymously is questionable.

As Jeremy Morris notes, Ritualism is “a particularly slippery term” to define.⁸⁹ The most venerable historian of Ritualism, Nigel Yates, adopts a capacious view of his subject as one encompassing “those ceremonial developments in the Church of England that were considered at the time to be making its services approximate more closely to the services of the Roman Catholic Church.”⁹⁰ Morris prescribes a more precise definition that demarcates Ritualism as a consolidation of practices that proliferated in the 1850s and 60s.⁹¹ Drawing from the criteria used by the Ritualist *Tourist’s Church Guide* and detailed by John Purchas’ *Directorium Anglicanum*, Morris subsequently identifies six definitive points of Ritualist practice: “the eastward-facing position of the celebrant, incense, the mixing of water and wine in the chalice,

⁸⁶ Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 302.

⁸⁷ Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice*, 41-54.

⁸⁸ George Herring, “The Parishes,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, edited by Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles, and James Pereiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 352-356.

⁸⁹ Jeremy Morris, *The High Church Revival in the Church of England: Arguments and Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 20.

⁹⁰ Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

⁹¹ Morris, *The High Church Revival in the Church of England*, 20.

wafer bread, eucharistic vestments, and lit candles on the alter during the eucharist.”⁹² Whether these points were followed in full varied across parishes. Nonetheless, taken together they encapsulate the essential features of Ritualism and elucidate it as a movement primarily concerned with liturgical form centered on eucharistic practice.

Ritualism’s occupation with liturgical practice obfuscates its connection to the Oxford Movement. This liturgical emphasis is clear in the common objective proclaimed by leading Ritualist clergy, including William Bennet (1804-1886), James Skinner (1818-1881), and Robert Liddell (1808-1888), to advance a ceremonial vision that realized “the complete ritual performance in all its aspects, textual, performative, and architectural.”⁹³ To some extent, this resonates with Tractarian sacramental theology, particularly its high view of the eucharist. However, a broad consensus among historians of the Oxford Movement contends that Tractarian leaders were “liturgically conservative” and “essentially indifferent” to questions of ritual.⁹⁴ The only exceptions to such indifference were instances of outright objection. Tractarian leaders including Newman and Edward Pusey actively sought to prevent liturgical controversies “from dominating or diverting what they conceived as the true objectives of the Movement,” which were more ecclesiastical, doctrinal, and pastoral in nature.⁹⁵ Ritualism thus pursued a liturgical agenda largely absent from the priorities of Tractarian leaders, making it difficult to define Ritualism as a direct descendant of the Oxford Movement.

⁹² Ibid, 20-21.

⁹³ Dominic Janes, *Victorian Reformation: The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England, 1840-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

⁹⁴ Frances Knight, “The Influence of the Oxford Movement in the Parishes c. 1833-1860: A Reassessment,” in *From Oxford to the People: Reconsidering Newman & the Oxford Movement*, edited by Paul Vaiss (Gracewing, 1996), 127-128.

⁹⁵ Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice*, 198.

The degree to which Ritualism can be associated with the Oxford Movement has thus become a contentious issue among historians. Traditionally, there has been “a widely-articulated belief that the Oxford Movement’s most enduring legacy was to be found in the impact of Ritualism.”⁹⁶ More recently, historians have challenged this perception. Yates locates Ritualism within a far more expansive lineage of “aesthetic and antiquarian movements” in Anglicanism, of which the Oxford Movement was merely one among many.⁹⁷ Herring delineates an even sharper distinction. While noting that many Ritualists, including Bennett and Skinner, claimed a link to the Oxford Movement, Herring also shows that many Tractarians, including Pusey, resisted adopting Ritualist practices and harbored “deep reservations about them” along both doctrinal and pastoral lines.⁹⁸ In an attempt to moderate Herring’s assertion that “many Tractarian clergymen were critical of Ritualist innovations and did not see these as a ‘logical outcome’ of their own views,” Morris suggests that the number of Tractarians, also highlighted by Herring, who did support Ritualism confound any stark contrast.⁹⁹ What does become clear from this historiography is that Ritualism cannot be identified as a direct inheritor of the Oxford Movement nor as strictly independent from it. Enough overlap persisted to maintain a connection between the two movements even as they diverged, particularly within the Ritualists’ liturgical vision. These dissimilarities were sufficient to render each a separate phenomenon.

Regardless of the insights provided by modern historians, Ritualism’s nineteenth century commentators, especially its opponents, did not recognize any appreciable discontinuity between the Oxford Movement and Ritualism. We can consequently affirm that the opposition to the Oxford Movement extended into the opposition to Ritualism. As Herring observes, “most of the

⁹⁶ Knight, “The Influence of the Oxford Movement in the Parishes,” 127.

⁹⁷ Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain*, 40.

⁹⁸ Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice*, 214-216.

⁹⁹ Jeremy Morris, “The Regional Growth of Tractarianism: Some Reflections,” in *From Oxford to the People: Reconsidering Newman & the Oxford Movement*, edited by Paul Vaiss (Gracewing, 1996), 144.

opponents of Ritualism were at one in interpreting the sudden growth of advanced ceremonial as a natural consequence of the Oxford *Tracts*.”¹⁰⁰ This prevalent perception is evident in how the term “Puseyite,” which had long been used to reference adherents to the Oxford Movement, was frequently used for adherents of Ritualism, unifying Ritualists and Tractarians under a common label.¹⁰¹

While contemporary observers discerned differences between the two movements, they did so within a narrative of continuity. William Girdlestone, writing in opposition to the Ritualists’ desire for “the sensational services of Rome,” provides an exemplary expression of this narrative in his 1867 anti-Ritualist treatise *The Romanizing Tendency of Ultra-Ritualism*.¹⁰² Although Girdlestone admits that it can “be said that Ritualism is quite a different thing from Tractarianism,” he views this separation as a consequence of progression rather than contradistinction.¹⁰³ Ritualism is unique “so far as it is a great advance upon the practical rather than the theoretical part of the question.”¹⁰⁴ It thus remains “only a logical sequence of Tract 90” brought to its natural fruition in the realm of liturgical practice.¹⁰⁵ Anti-Tractarian evangelical Francis Close (1797-1882) offered a similar line of thought in a lecture on the dangers of Ritualism delivered in the same year.¹⁰⁶ Close perceives no fundamental distinction between the Oxford Movement and Ritualism, placing both under the broader umbrella of “Popery” and remarking that, when under the guise of the former, “the Ritualists... have been convicted over and over again of being Romanists, both in practice and principle.”¹⁰⁷ For Close, Ritualism then

¹⁰⁰ Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice*, 212.

¹⁰¹ Janes, *Victorian Reformation*, 44.

¹⁰² William Harding Girdlestone, *The Romanizing Tendency of Ultra-Ritualism* (London: Rivingtons, 1867), 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Francis Close, *Ritualism: A Lecture* (London: William Macintosh, 1867).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

varies only in expression. It retains the same underlying principles as its forebear, the Oxford Movement, and is thus treated with the same lines of anti-Catholic opposition.

Anti-Catholicism in the Mid-Victorian Era

The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 was but one in a series of galvanizing events that enflamed anti-Catholic sentiment and movements well through the end of the nineteenth century. Each category of Wolffe's fourfold typology of anti-Catholicism is represented in the period: constitutional-national, theological, socio-cultural, and popular anti-Catholicism.¹⁰⁸ These elements are evident in two defining events and their fallout: the 1850 restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales and the reception of the First Vatican Council (1870). While the Maynooth Grant controversy and the exponential increase of the Catholic population in England driven by Irish immigration set the groundwork, these two events were most instrumental in maintaining anti-Catholicism as "a significant factor in the politics of the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s."¹⁰⁹

Noting the burgeoning population of Irish Catholic immigrants, Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) deemed it administratively necessary to restore the Roman Catholic hierarchy to England and Wales during the 1840s.¹¹⁰ After navigating delays caused by legal hurdles in Britain and political upheaval in Rome, the Vatican followed through on its plan in 1850, inciting a reaction in Britain that would represent, according to the Wolffe, "the highwater mark of political anti-Catholicism."¹¹¹ Far from a simple administrative affair, the restoration of the hierarchy was received by many as an act of "papal aggression" against "British sovereignty," one that

¹⁰⁸ John Wolffe, "A Comparative Historical Categorisation of Anti-Catholicism," *Journal of Religious History* 39 (2015): 182-202.

¹⁰⁹ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism," 200.

¹¹⁰ E.B. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), 53.

¹¹¹ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism," 199.

subsequently “provoked the most widespread manifestation of anti-Catholicism” after 1830.¹¹² The prime minister, Lord John Russell (1792-1878), led the charge against “papal aggression” with a widely publicized letter addressed to the Bishop of Durham.¹¹³ In this letter, Russell declares that “there is an assumption of power in all the documents which have come from Rome.”¹¹⁴ This is elaborated as “a pretension of supremacy over the realm of England, and a claim to sole and undivided sway, which is inconsistent with the Queen’s supremacy... and with the spiritual independence of the nation.”¹¹⁵ Russell proceeds to sharpen his point with an appeal to England’s Protestant identity adjoined to a political threat: “The liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences.”¹¹⁶

Upon being appointed the first cardinal archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman (1802-1865) sent a pastoral letter to the Catholics of England and Wales that, when more widely published, stoked more than it alleviated public fears of purported Catholic political ambitions. The letter was blithely triumphalist in tone, leading Yates to assess that the papal aggression controversy was “handled very tactlessly by Wiseman in a manner calculated to inflame Protestant opinion.”¹¹⁷ E.B. Norman concurs with Yates’ conclusion, writing that “had not Wiseman admitted authorship,” one could “almost certainly have claimed the Pastoral as an ultra-Protestant forgery deliberately intended to provoke the anti-papal susceptibilities of Englishmen.”¹¹⁸ Whether this was Wiseman’s intent is a question eclipsed by the reality of its

¹¹² Ibid, 191.

¹¹³ John Russell, “Lord John Russell’s Letter to the Bishop of Durham, 1850,” in E.B. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), 159-161.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 159-160.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 160.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain*, 65.

¹¹⁸ Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, 56.

reception. In his letter, Wiseman boldly and enthusiastically pronounced that the restored hierarchy would “and shall continue to govern, the counties of Middlesex, Hertford, and Essex, as ordinary thereof, and those of Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Berkshire, and Hampshire, with the islands annexed, as administrator with ordinary jurisdiction.”¹¹⁹ Protestant publications seized upon this rhetoric of dominion as evidence supporting a Catholic scheme that would see Wiseman “equal to the Queen in rank.”¹²⁰ Wiseman sought to mitigate the furor by publishing *An Appeal to the Reason and Good Feeling of the English People on the subject of the Catholic Hierarchy*.¹²¹ However, the damage had been done. A likely apocryphal quote ascribed to Queen Victoria as her reaction to Wiseman’s pastoral letter aptly summarizes the political tenor of the moment: “Am I Queen of England or am I not?”¹²²

Aside from a largely ineffectual legislative agenda instigated by Russell,¹²³ the most enduring legacy of the papal aggression controversy was its stimulation of a flurry of theological and popular anti-Catholic activity imbued with sufficient momentum to persevere for decades. One immediate product of this reinvigorated anti-Catholicism was the publication of “literally hundreds” of meticulously detailed monographs controverting Catholic doctrine and ecclesiology point-by-point.¹²⁴ These were authored from a variety of Protestant perspectives, though most commonly by evangelicals, with the ultimate intent of reinforcing the view that Roman Catholicism represented a dangerous perversion of Christianity. Richard Paul Blakeney’s 1851

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Ibid.

¹²⁰ Frank H. Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 61-62.

¹²¹ Nicholas Wiseman, *An Appeal to the Reason and Good Feeling to the English People on the subject of the Catholic Hierarchy* (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1850).

¹²² Quoted in Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, 56.

¹²³ The most notable piece of legislation was the 1851 Ecclesiastical Titles Act, which forbade the use of episcopal titles outside the established Church of England. It proved ineffective in practice and was later repealed.

¹²⁴ Albert D. Pionke, *Plots of Opportunity: Representing Conspiracy in Victorian England* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), 149.

Manual of Romish Controversy offers but just one example.¹²⁵ Its content is well indicated by its subtitle, *Being a Complete Refutation of the Creed of Pope Pius IV*. This refers to the Council of Trent; Pius IV presided over the final session. The comprehensive work considers twenty-three separate doctrinal and ecclesiological positions before culminating in the claim that the creed of Pius IV, being that of the Roman Catholic Church, is “not true, not catholic, and not necessary to salvation.”¹²⁶

Another notable development was the significance of itinerant preachers who galvanized popular anti-Catholic sentiment and violence. Two infamous examples can be found in the careers of William Murphy (1834-1872) and Alessandro Gavazzi (1809-1889). Murphy, renowned as a compelling evangelical preacher, is best known for his inciting role in the eponymous Murphy Riots that took place in Birmingham during the summer of 1867. Already beset with tensions surrounding its large population of Irish Catholics, Birmingham was especially vulnerable to Murphy’s incendiary style.¹²⁷ Murphy’s oratory combined “anti-Irish racist slurs” with extreme anti-Catholic fearmongering punctuated by claims “that he could prove that every Popish priest was a murderer, a cannibal, a liar and a pickpocket.”¹²⁸ He warned “working-class men that the Irish had come over to underbid them in the job market” and encouraged his audience “to take revenge against their Catholic neighbours.”¹²⁹ Many did just that. Similar eruptions of violence followed in the wake of Gavazzi. A former monk from Naples, Gavazzi’s “attacks on his former co-religionists prompted literally hundreds of ‘No

¹²⁵ Richard Paul Blakeney, *A Manual of Romish Controversy: Being a Complete Refutation of the Creed of Pope Pius IV* (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1851).

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 207.

¹²⁷ Philomena Sutherland, “Sectarianism and Evangelicalism in Birmingham and Liverpool, 1850-2010,” in *Protestant-Catholic Conflict from the Reformation to the Twenty-first Century: The Dynamics of Religious Difference*, edited by John Wolffe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 138-139.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 139.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

Popery' disturbances during his preaching tours."¹³⁰ Gavazzi's 1866 anti-Catholic screed *No Union with Rome* offers some insight into the colorful imagery projected by his rhetoric. His description of the Catholic Church as "the Mother of Harlots" that "wraps itself up in its mantle dyed red in the blood of the saints, sacrificed by fanaticism on the alter of the Inquisition" provides one such example.¹³¹

In 1870, the decrees of the First Vatican Council, convoked by Pope Pius IX, "gave renewed stimulus to anti-Catholic fears and suspicions."¹³² The council's forceful declaration of papal authority, which emphasized the papacy's supreme power over all jurisdictions of the Roman Catholic Church, revived public paranoia regarding Catholic political ambitions. Although the ensuing backlash materialized to a lesser degree than that of 1850, it still had a tangible legislative impact. Conservative MP Charles Newdegate (1816-1887), for instance, suddenly encountered great enthusiasm in Parliament for his previously unsuccessful attempts to establish a committee to investigate Catholic convents.¹³³ Parliament's already floundering Irish policy was also confounded by the controversy as Westminster became increasingly "against any concessions to Catholicism at all."¹³⁴ The failure of the 1873 Irish University Bill, which led to the resignation of the Liberal prime minister William Gladstone (1809-1898), well encapsulated Parliament's refusal to grant any further degree of institutional agency to Catholics in Britain after Vatican I; educational in this case.¹³⁵

Following his resignation, Gladstone only became more dubious of Catholic political intentions before outright accusing British Catholics of disloyalty to the state, a common anti-

¹³⁰ Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, 18.

¹³¹ Alessandro Gavazzi, *No Union with Rome: An Anti-Eirenicon* (London, 1866), 61.

¹³² Wolfe, "Anti-Catholicism," 200.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, 83.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

Catholic motif.¹³⁶ For Gladstone, Vatican I's decrees on papal authority committed Catholic fealties to the pope above, and to the detriment of, any temporal regime. This not only manifested a religious threat against the Church of England, but also a political one as Gladstone "was suspicious of international religious developments that seemed to be extrinsically linked to political intent."¹³⁷ Gladstone published his concerns in 1874 and elaborated them in greater length a year later.¹³⁸ He raises a central question that gestures towards his answer: "that England is entitled to ask, and to know, in what way the obedience required by the Pope and the Council of the Vatican is to be reconciled with the integrity of civil allegiance?"¹³⁹ After the council, Gladstone asserts, one can no longer aver that "there is nothing in the necessary belief of the Roman Catholic which can appear to impeach his full civil title."¹⁴⁰

Returning to Wolffe's four categories of anti-Catholicism, we find each resonant throughout the mid-Victorian era. Constitutional-national anti-Catholicism, which can be more broadly classified as political anti-Catholicism, prevails as a preeminent feature across the reactions to the restoration of the hierarchy and the First Vatican Council. It encompasses all variants of the claim that the Roman Catholic Church represented an existential political threat. This was amplified by concerns regarding the loyalty of an increasing population of Roman Catholics seen as a potentially subversive fifth column within Britain. The copious volume of doctrinal and ecclesiological polemic published during the period exemplifies theological anti-Catholicism. In the aftermath of 1850, its strength was at an apex from which it would gradually

¹³⁶ V. Alan McClelland, "Catholics, Politics, and the State in Britain," in in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, Volume IV: Building Identity, 1830-1913*, edited by Carmen M. Mangion and Susan O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 209.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 216.

¹³⁸ W. E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1875).

¹³⁹ Ibid, 31.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 43.

decline in favor of political consternations during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Itinerant preachers who drew upon social anxieties to engender anti-Catholic sentiment provide an example of socio-cultural anti-Catholicism. Many facets of this category emerge around the issue of Irish immigration, fear of the other, and related legislative matters, such as in the area of education. While each of these categories were certainly prominent, Frank Wallis contends that the most enduring anti-Catholic legacy of this period, and the papal aggression controversy in particular, was its formative “impact on ultra-Protestants.”¹⁴¹

Jesuit Conspiracy Theories

As seen in the relatively rare examples of early anti-Oxford Movement conspiracy theories discussed in the previous chapter, the Jesuit order appears as a common agitator in anti-Catholic conspiracism. The frequency of such references indicates a phenomenon of a much broader scale; one that places the Jesuits alongside such examples as the Illuminati and the Free Masons in the pantheon of groups most often implicated in modern conspiracy theories. Jesuit conspiracy theories must then be recognized as a distinct, transnational category with deep and intricate historical roots. Untangling this history would go well beyond the scope of this project. However, a brief outline of anti-Jesuit conspiracism, with an attentiveness to Britain, will nonetheless provide important context for the subsequent chapter’s study of ultra-Protestant conspiracism in late nineteenth century Britain.

Andrew McKenzi-McHarg describes anti-Jesuit conspiracism as a “complex, multi-layered, pluri-directional relationship between the Society of Jesus and conspiracy theories.”¹⁴² Such theories have drawn from a popular characterization wherein the Jesuits are “typecast as

¹⁴¹ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 58.

¹⁴² Andrew McKenzi-McHarg, “Jesuits, Conspiracies, and Conspiracy Theories,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 10 (2023): 17.

sinister agents who blindly obeyed the pope and who were willing to stoop to the most devious of means and deceitful of measures” to accomplish the tyrannical expansionist ambitions of Rome.¹⁴³ This conceptualization was shaped by a perception of the Jesuits as the militant “vanguard of the Counter-Reformation” and by the order’s tendency to eschew political power structures while operating as a fiercely independent organ of the Vatican, one answerable only and directly to the pope.¹⁴⁴ Henry Foulis (1638-1669) exemplifies this framework in his claim that the Jesuits’ “vow” of “*Obedience to the Pope*” had been invaluable “to the *Roman Catholick Cause*.”¹⁴⁵ This was especially so, Foulis writes, “if a man may suppose (as I know nothing to the contrary), that many bloody actions perpetrated in *France, England*, and other places, hath been the result of this Obediential State-Vow.”¹⁴⁶ This prevalent view caused the Jesuits to be implicated in a number of political conspiracies, including two assassination plots, one against King Louis XV of France in 1757 and another against King Joseph of Portugal in 1758.¹⁴⁷ Such accusations and the political apprehensions they engendered contributed to the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773. However, suppression did not prevent persisting charges that the Jesuits covertly continued operation as a secret society.¹⁴⁸ The restoration of the order in 1814 cemented anti-Jesuit conspiracism as an enduring, transnational motif into the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Johnathan M. Pettinato, “Jeers, Jingo, and Jesuits: Britishness, Edmund Burke, and Crises of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society* 30 (2015): 102.

¹⁴⁵ Henry Foulis, “Some Observations of the Jesuites Political Constitution, Temper and Actions, especially relating to our late Troubles,” in *The History of the Wicked Plots and Conspiracies of Our Pretended Saints: Representing the Beginning, Constitution, and Desings of the Jesuite...* (London, E. Gotes, 1662), 11.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ McKenzi-McHarg, “Jesuits, Conspiracies, and Conspiracy Theories,” 16.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Geoffrey Cubitt has highlighted the prominence of anti-Jesuit conspiracism in nineteenth century France. He connects this, as one often can, to a more general dynamic of anti-Jesuitism and anti-Jesuit mythology: Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 5-8; For a discussion of anti-Jesuitism in the United States, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Anti-Catholicism in*

In Britain, anti-Jesuit conspiracy theories are typified by the recurring theme that the “Jesuits were regarded as intent on reclaiming England and Britain for Catholicism.”¹⁵⁰ With the monarchy and the Church of England deeply intertwined, a conspiracy against one is easily and often expanded into a conspiracy against the other. Jesuit conspiracy theories in Britain consequently corresponded to moments of heightened public anxiety regarding the stability of Britain’s Protestant order. Two events stand out as significant examples that “whipped up a frenzy of anti-Catholic, anti-Jesuit sentiment:” the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the Popish Plot that arrested the public’s attention between 1678 and 1681.¹⁵¹

The Gunpowder Plot represents a case in which a real conspiracy was developed into a series of conspiracy theories that implicated agents, namely the Catholic Church and the Jesuit order, beyond the limited circle of the true perpetrators. This elaboration was made intuitive by the details of the conspiracy, an assassination plot concocted by a group of Catholic agitators against King James I that involved an attempt to blow up the House of Lords. Most Gunpowder Plot conspiracy theories unfolded by connecting the perpetrators with a Jesuit priest, whose involvement was thereby presumed. For example, the French historian Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553-1617) connects the plot’s most famous conspirator, Guy Fawkes, with Oswald Tesimond, a Jesuit priest.¹⁵² Thou proceeds to claim that Tesimond acted as an interlocutor between the plotters and Rome who was “privately *sent into Spain*” to arrange for a Catholic army to be deployed in England amidst the aftermath of Parliament’s detonation.¹⁵³

America, 1620-1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and for an example of an American Jesuit conspiracy theory see Samuel B. Morse, *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, & Co., 1835).

¹⁵⁰ Pettinato, “Jeers, Jingo, and Jesuits,” 102.

¹⁵¹ McKenzi-McHarg, “Jesuits, Conspiracies, and Conspiracy Theories,” 20-21.

¹⁵² Jacques-Auguste de Thou, “The History of the Powder-Plot,” in *The Histories of the Gunpowder-Treason and the Massacre at Paris...* (London, 1676), 2.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Another Jesuit priest similarly inculpated was Henry Garnet (1555-1606), the Superior of the Jesuit mission in Britain. Garnet learned of the plot by the confession of Robert Catesby.¹⁵⁴ As this information was protected under the seal of confession, Garnet did not share his knowledge of the scheme nor was he able to prevent it, despite his incessant attempts to dissuade its architects.¹⁵⁵ Garnet's foreknowledge led to his execution during the trials that followed the foiling of the Gunpowder Plot. The prosecuting council, Sir Edward Coke, presented Garnet's supposed involvement as the missing piece that fully revealed the Gunpowder Plot to be the "Jesuits' treason," denoted as but one example of a preponderance of "pestilent and pernicious treason" that had occurred since "the Jesuits set foot in this land."¹⁵⁶

Unlike the Gunpowder Plot, the Popish Plot was an entirely fictitious conspiracy fabricated by Titus Oates (1649-1705). A fanatically anti-Catholic Anglican priest, Oates joined with an anti-Catholic academic Israel Tonge (1621-1680) to conjure a conspiracy theory that posited an imminent assassination attempt on King Charles II orchestrated by the Jesuit order on behalf of Rome.¹⁵⁷ The warning was passed up to the monarch himself and set off a cascading chain of incidents that, alongside amplified public paranoia driven "by the frightening prospect of the Jesuit who would assimilate into English society," generated a multiyear hysteria indulged by show trials and executions.¹⁵⁸ One instance saw five Jesuits executed at once in 1679. A newspaper reporting on the executions commented of the Jesuits that "you may observe that their want of Morality and their Equivocations will unravel the most sacred Bonds of Society; and that

¹⁵⁴ Philip Caraman, *Henry Garnet 1555-1606 and the Gunpowder Plot* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1964), 322.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Ibid, 397-398.

¹⁵⁷ John Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972).

¹⁵⁸ Pettinato, "Jeers, Jingo, Jesuits," 103.

nothing can oblige them to integrity, or secure their Allegiance.”¹⁵⁹ Although Oates’ farce was uncovered in 1681, leading to his imprisonment for perjury and effectively ending the Popish Plot frenzy, the image of the disguised Jesuit infiltrating Britain to conspire against the state persevered.

These seventeenth century events set the pattern for what had thereby been established as a lasting tradition of Jesuit conspiracy theories in Britain that remained prevalent through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Albert Pionke notes this “remarkable continuity of anti-Jesuitism in England over time” and connects it to the common “invocation of the figure of Jesuitism... to uphold a definition of national citizenship grounded in binary opposition between English Protestants and Roman Catholics.”¹⁶⁰ The perception of the Jesuits as a “Catholic secret society” acting as “the authors of all past, present and future Popish plots against the crown” proved a tenacious one that drew from past conspiracy theories to propagate new ones in a mutually reinforcing cycle.¹⁶¹ As they had been in the seventeenth century, “the Jesuit was one of the bogeymen of late-eighteenth-century Britain.”¹⁶² Even Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Johnathan Pettinato shows, was suspected of being an undercover Jesuit, in part due to his Irish Catholic ancestry.¹⁶³

This dynamic continued into the nineteenth century as anti-Jesuit conspiracism remained a central feature of British anti-Catholicism, therefrom extended into the opposition to the Oxford Movement and related ultra-Protestant conspiracy theories. Girdlestone and Gavazzi parrot each other’s 1867 publications by accusing Tractarians and Ritualists, perceived by both to

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Pionke, *Plots of Opportunity*, 53; 151.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 59.

¹⁶² Pettinato, “Jeers, Jingo, and Jesuits,” 102.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 93-94.

represent the same cause, of being “Jesuit[s] in disguise” and “disguised Jesuits” respectively.¹⁶⁴ Walter Walsh himself, among the most prominent of the ultra-Protestant conspiracists, authored a history of the Jesuit order in Britain that includes discussions of the Gunpowder Plot and the Popish Plot.¹⁶⁵ The book reads like an anthology of Jesuit conspiracy theories stitched together in a chronological historical framework. They construct a narrative in which the forces of the Protestant Reformation, “the wonder of the world,” struggle against “the exertions of the Society of Jesus.”¹⁶⁶ Walsh’s integration of the religious and the political within a synthesized structure of conspiracy theories will be a prominent topic in the next chapter. Jesuit conspiracy theories, alongside the enduring perceptions that shaped them, were a cornerstone of this nineteenth century ultra-Protestant propensity for conspiracism.

Conclusion

Conspiracy theories, specifically anti-Catholic conspiracy theories, were but a marginal feature of the initial opposition to the Oxford Movement between 1833 and 1845. Ultra-Protestantism and its predilection for anti-Catholic conspiracy theories emerged from a sociocultural and political context especially conducive to cultivating such impulses. This environment of popular anti-Catholic fervor punctuated by a rich tradition of anti-Jesuit conspiracism thus formed the context in which ultra-Protestantism developed and then deployed anti-Catholic conspiracy theories against the Oxford Movement and its perceived heirs. In the next chapter, we shall how ultra-Protestant organizations with a distinctive conspiratorial impulse came to dominate the enduring landscape of anti-Tractarian activity.

¹⁶⁴ Girdlestone, *The Romanizing Tendency of Ultra-Ritualism*, 4; Gavazzi, *No Union with Rome*, vi.

¹⁶⁵ Walter Walsh, *The Jesuits in Great Britain: An Historical Inquiry into their Political Influence* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1903).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

Chapter Three – Ultra-Protestantism, Walter Walsh, and the Ascendancy of Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories in the Opposition to the Oxford Movement

Introduction

On June 16th, 1898, Sir William Harcourt (1827-1904), the leader of the Liberal Party, declared before Parliament that Britain was under siege by a “widely spread and deeply rooted” conspiracy.¹⁶⁷ Harcourt alleged that conspirators had established a network of “secret societies” within the Church of England intent on “overthrowing the principles of the English Reformation” in an attack against Britain’s Protestant national identity, its religious institutions, and its political sovereignty.¹⁶⁸ Harcourt’s allegations echoed those of an even more sensationalist speech delivered before the same session of Parliament by Liberal MP Samuel Smith (1836-1906). After declaring that “secret societies” permeated the Anglican Church, Smith averred that the objective of their conspiracy was to effectuate a “reunion with the Church of Rome.”¹⁶⁹ More striking than the content of Harcourt and Smith’s claims was the source they cited as evidence: *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* by Walter Walsh (1847-1912), a prolific ultra-Protestant polemicist and one of its most effective organizers. Originally published in 1897, Walsh’s best-selling book details an elaborate plot casting the Oxford Movement, Ritualism, and Anglo-Catholicism, used interchangeably, as the instruments of a covert scheme to subversively facilitate a reunion between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.¹⁷⁰ The appearance of Walsh’s theory in Parliament is but one example demonstrating that, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, anti-Catholic conspiracy theories had shifted

¹⁶⁷ Hansard lix (16 June 1898), 482-483.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 477.

¹⁷⁰ Walter Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, sixth edition (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1899); Subsequent citations of *The Secret History* will refer to the sixth edition unless otherwise noted.

from the periphery of the opposition to the Oxford Movement to a central feature. The rise of ultra-Protestantism within that opposition is the most convincing explanation for this remarkable development, one with sociopolitical and ecclesiastical consequences within late nineteenth-century Britain.

To understand how anti-Catholic conspiracy theories came to occupy such a central space within the opposition to the Oxford Movement, we must first define ultra-Protestantism, outline its history, and delineate its distinctive predilection for anti-Catholic conspiracism. With this context in place, we will be equipped to then study Walsh's work, which has received exiguous historiographical attention, as the culmination of this dynamic. Finally, we will evaluate how anti-Catholic conspiracy theories, Walsh's in particular, functioned as a pillar of the resurgent opposition to the Oxford Movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century. This principally occurred within the Great Church Crisis (1898-1906), a factional dispute within the Church of England incited by large-scale political and ecclesiastical mobilization against the growth of Anglo-Catholicism. Walsh's *Secret History* was the principal instigator of this conflict, which formed the context of Harcourt and Smith's invocation of the title.¹⁷¹ The impact of ultra-Protestantism and its anti-Catholic conspiracism influenced British policy both domestically and throughout the empire. Therefore, although historians often emphasize the decline of British anti-Catholicism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a closer study of ultra-Protestantism contests this narrative by highlighting a politically potent strand of popular anti-Catholicism; one that was invigorated by the proliferation of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories deployed against the Oxford Movement.

¹⁷¹ Bethany Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis and the End of English Erastianism, 1898-1906* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1.

Ultra-Protestantism and Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories

Ultra-Protestantism is a moniker originated and deployed by modern historians to categorize a contingent of radical, often militant Protestants active in England, Scotland, and the wider British Empire during the mid-to-late Victorian era.¹⁷² This activity was channeled through ultra-Protestant organizations primarily composed of evangelicals in the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, and the Free Church of Scotland alongside other dissenting traditions. Accordingly, ultra-Protestants professed an evangelical agenda emphasizing biblical literalism, a conversion experience, and the importance of social activism.¹⁷³ These tenets were secondary to the presiding concern that animated their endeavors: anti-Catholicism. Ultra-Protestantism's insistence that Britain's national identity was indissolubly Protestant led it to consider any perceived encroachment of Catholicism to be an existential threat to British religious liberty and political sovereignty. From this fear, ultra-Protestants developed a distinctive penchant for conspiratorial thinking that inspired their proliferation of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories.

The immediate roots of ultra-Protestantism can be traced back to the reactionary backlash against the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829). Early ultra-Protestant groups included the British Reformation Society, founded in 1827 and later renamed the Protestant Reformation Society, and the Protestant Association, founded in 1835.¹⁷⁴ After failing to prevent or overturn Catholic emancipation, such organizations shifted their focus during the 1830s and 1840s towards

¹⁷² See G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Frank H. Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993); and John Wolfe, "Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire, 1815-1914," in *Empires of Religion*, edited by Hilary Carey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁷³ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 2.

¹⁷⁴ John Wolfe, "Change and Continuity in British Anti-Catholicism, 1829-1982," in *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789*, edited by Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 72.

containing Catholicism on multiple fronts. In practice, this agenda was pursued through political efforts, most notably against the annual government grant to Maynooth College, a Catholic seminary in Ireland, and with vocal opposition to the Catholicizing tendencies of the Oxford Movement, thus rendered a frequent ultra-Protestant target.¹⁷⁵ The patterns of activity demonstrated by these early operations typified the strategies later ultra-Protestants would continue to deploy. Such ventures included arranging lecture tours, running petition campaigns, designing educational resources, and publishing books, pamphlets, and periodicals all aimed at combatting Catholicism.¹⁷⁶

As discussed in the previous chapter, the papal aggression controversy instigated a dramatic surge of enduring ultra-Protestant organization. During the brief height of the controversy between 1850 and 1851, the number of ultra-Protestant groups in England and Scotland increased substantially.¹⁷⁷ These new societies sought to foster “Protestant solidarity” and thereby take full advantage of a vigorously anti-Catholic environment by pursuing “propaganda and political activities designed to check the Catholic advance.”¹⁷⁸ The resulting constellation of organizations forged an “extended machinery of Protestant agitation” that would function through the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁹

The two most significant ultra-Protestant organizations founded during the papal aggression controversy were the Protestant Alliance in London and the Scottish Reformation Society (SRS) in Edinburgh. Neither group ever boasted an official membership of more than a

¹⁷⁵ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868*, 91-99.

¹⁷⁶ D.G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 33.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁷⁸ John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 249; Wallis, *Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 113.

¹⁷⁹ Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 247, 253-258.

few thousand. However, as John Wolffe notes, “when consideration is given to the large audiences at many of their meetings, to the numerous visits carried out by their agents, and to the considerable literature which they published and circulated,” it becomes evident that these societies “merit careful investigation.”¹⁸⁰ While the historiography of the Protestant Alliance and the SRS has gestured towards their anti-Catholic conspiracism, it has insufficiently elaborated the importance of this characteristic within their respective programs. This is a shortcoming that needs to be addressed for, as we shall see, both organizations played a foundational role in shaping the influential anti-Catholic conspiracy theories of the late nineteenth century. Their conspiratorial rhetoric should thus be highlighted.

The Protestant Alliance was founded on June 25th, 1851 under the chairmanship of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885).¹⁸¹ Within a year, it had gained the support of 49 affiliated societies located throughout England, quickly establishing its position as the country’s foremost ultra-Protestant society.¹⁸² Its founding principles included “opposition to Papal Aggression,” the “defense of Reformation principles and religious liberty,” and the desire “to awaken British Protestants to a sense of Christian patriotism.”¹⁸³ This platform was to be realized through advocating “pure Protestant Christianity” and by the “zealous preaching of the Gospel.”¹⁸⁴ As these priorities indicate, Lord Shaftesbury was a committed evangelical. His leadership in the Zionist movement and successful stewardship of an extensive program of social reform legislation, which his biographers have detailed to the neglect of his anti-Catholic activities, were further motivated by deep millenarian convictions.¹⁸⁵ Correspondingly, the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 6-7.

¹⁸¹ Wallis, *Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 94.

¹⁸² Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868*, 154.

¹⁸³ Wallis, *Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 94.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 95.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 95-96.

initial composition of the Protestant Alliance was also largely evangelical. As Edwin Hodder soundly claimed, “on the first General Committee of the Alliance there was enrolled almost every Evangelical of note in town and country.”¹⁸⁶

Regardless of this evangelical dominance, the stated intent of the Protestant Alliance was to cultivate an “ecumenical no-popery movement” that transcended Protestant divisions to muster resistance against a common, existential foe.¹⁸⁷ This emphasis was one attribute that distinguished it from earlier ultra-Protestant groups, which were less amiable to working with the Anglican establishment.¹⁸⁸ The Alliance was also more politically inclusive than its predecessors and featured prominent Liberal figures in its leadership, a remarkable feat in a space previously dominated by Conservatives.¹⁸⁹ A bit counterintuitively, the Protestant Alliance was also founded upon the belief that its forebearers were too moderate, creating the need for a true “militantly anti-Catholic interdenominational movement.”¹⁹⁰ This was the void that the Protestant Alliance sought to fill.

Despite internal turmoil, the Protestant Alliance managed to successfully exert its influence throughout the mid-Victorian era. Conflicts within the Alliance were waged along the lines of dissenting versus establishment church affiliations and, within the latter, moderate versus evangelical.¹⁹¹ The Protestant Alliance thus failed to realize its ecumenical vision. It fared better in its attempts to mobilize a militant anti-Catholic movement. Although the momentum of the papal aggression controversy waned amidst an assortment of ineffective anti-Catholic legislation, as we saw in the previous chapter, British anti-Catholicism remained resilient. The Protestant

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 251.

¹⁸⁷ Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, 188-189.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 188.

¹⁸⁹ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868*, 154.

¹⁹⁰ Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 142.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 253-258.

Alliance, often in cooperation with the SRS, therefore sustained its relevance for decades. Several anti-Catholic causes fueled this persistence, namely the continued attempts to repeal the Maynooth Grant, Charles Newdegate's convent inspection campaigns, battles against Catholic influence in education, and the political and theological struggle against Ritualism, which maintained ultra-Protestantism's engagement with the Oxford Movement.¹⁹²

During the mid-Victorian era, ultra-Protestantism developed a conspiratorial nature that led its adherents to disseminate anti-Catholic conspiracy theories to a wide audience. Anxieties evoked by the reinstatement of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain and the notion that this action harbored a more insidious hidden agenda represented one source of this phenomenon. The broader background of British anti-Catholicism and the preponderance of Jesuit conspiracy theories also fostered and informed ultra-Protestant conspiracism. Additionally, ultra-Protestants directly engaged with a geopolitical landscape in continental Europe that further provoked their fear of Catholic power. In the aftermath of a wave of revolutions that swept Europe in 1848, British observers witnessed "absolutist Catholic Powers in Europe" exert "renewed force" to reconsolidate their authority.¹⁹³ For ultra-Protestants, this reinforced perceptions of Catholicism as a tyrannical force that threatened religious and political freedom. This imminent threat elicited the urgent need to publicly identify the papal conspiracy and marshal the virtues of Britain's Protestant identity, the wellspring and custodian of British liberties, against it.

An 1851 Protestant Alliance meeting detailed in the *Times* provides an indicative example of the conspiratorial rhetoric diffused by ultra-Protestants.¹⁹⁴ Lord Shaftesbury opened the meeting by affirming the group's commitment to "offering a consolidated resistance to Papal

¹⁹² Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, 38, 189; Walter L. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1982).

¹⁹³ Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 131.

¹⁹⁴ All quotes in this paragraph are taken from "The Protestant Alliance," *Times*, November 29, 1851, 5.

aggressions... alike crafty and bold against our spiritual and political liberties.” He proceeded by asserting that “the outrageous insolence of the Papal power” demonstrated in Europe post-1848 and in Britain during the papal aggression controversy represented a grave threat to “the temporal and spiritual welfare and prosperity of this kingdom.” The Rev. R. Burgess reiterated Shaftesbury’s argument with a more pointed statement positing that “Popery was not a confederacy against the religious liberties only of men; but a political conspiracy against their civil liberties.” Elaborating the nature of this conspiracy, the Rev. W. Chalmers explained that to squash the 1848 revolutions, “the Governments on the continent... had called in the Romish priesthood,” forging a “great Popish league” that could “lead to a crusade against the Protestantism and liberties of England.” Chalmers postulated that supporters of “the recent Papal aggression” used the pretense of toleration to “disguise” their true agenda for “toleration was not what they wanted, but ascendancy.” The Catholic threat was both external and internal. The Protestant Alliance was thus tasked with galvanizing England to act upon its responsibility to fight against the Papal conspiracy at home and abroad. In this respect, Chalmers declared that England must stand against Rome as “the Thermopylae of Europe.”

Such views were solidified by the Madiai controversy. In August 1852, after “allegedly holding a Protestant religious meeting in their home,” Francesco and Rosa Madiai were imprisoned in Florence in an “act of religious persecution, perpetrated by an authoritarian government subject to strong influence from the Roman Catholic Church” that “seemed to substantiate the worst Protestant perceptions of Rome.”¹⁹⁵ In a speech delivered just months before the Madiais’ arrest, prominent anti-Catholic agitator and ultra-Protestant leader Hugh McNeill had stated that while Protestants proselytized with “reason and scripture,” Rome

¹⁹⁵ Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 267.

deployed “the force of assassins and pistol bullets” and “put an end to arguments by imprisonment and murder.”¹⁹⁶ The Protestant Alliance thus organized “vigorous efforts” to secure the Madaia’s release.¹⁹⁷ It managed to impel the British government to take diplomatic action that eventually realized this objective, resulting in “one of the Protestant Alliance’s most notable achievements.”¹⁹⁸ Thereafter, the Alliance sought to replicate this outcome in future cases wherein Protestants were seen to be oppressed in Catholic Europe, such as that of the Matamoros imprisonment in 1860s Spain.¹⁹⁹

Though the Protestant Alliance partook in its share of conspiratorial rhetoric, the SRS was the most significant source and distributor of ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracy theories. Founded in 1850, the Society shared the Protestant Alliance’s ecumenical ideal and militant disposition. The two organizations frequently cooperated, participating in many of the same anti-Catholic crusades throughout the mid-Victorian era.²⁰⁰ They also suffered from similar internal conflicts. Much of the SRS’ leadership was affiliated with the dissenting Free Church of Scotland, causing anti-Catholic figures in the established Church of Scotland to worry that the society “was too closely associated with the denominational interests of the Free Church.”²⁰¹ This tension did not prevent the SRS from cementing itself as Scotland’s leading ultra-Protestant operation. It emerged from meetings “held in almost every village and town in Scotland on the topic of ‘Papal Aggression’” and boasted 38 branches throughout Scotland within two years.²⁰² By 1855, that number had grown to 64.²⁰³ According to the objectives

¹⁹⁶ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 99.

¹⁹⁷ Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 267.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 267-268.

¹⁹⁹ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 99.

²⁰⁰ Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, 37, 188; Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 160-162, 262.

²⁰¹ Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 250, 253.

²⁰² James Edmund Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Oxford: Cork University Press, 1947), 94.

outlined during its first meeting, the SRS was created “to resist the aggressions of Popery, to watch over the designs and movements of its promoters and abettors, and to diffuse sound and Scriptural information on the distinctive tenets of Protestantism and Popery.”²⁰⁴ From its origins, the SRS thus made clear its conspiratorial anxieties regarding the “designs and movements” of Catholicism.

This proclivity for anti-Catholic conspiracism emanated foremost from James Begg (1808-1883), a Free Church minister and the main founder of the SRS. Begg believed that “Rome represented the heart of an anti-scriptural political conspiracy that aimed at world domination” and that “small Protestant nations such as Scotland were a crucial bulwark of liberty against the machinations of Popery.”²⁰⁵ His anti-Catholic polemic thus extended beyond doctrinal concerns to scrutinize the Church’s political ambitions. Begg thus described Catholicism as “a great gigantic system of despotism,” one that he reported had infiltrated Parliament with papal agents that could exploit party politics to produce favorable legislative outcomes.²⁰⁶

Concerned that Britain’s anti-Catholic scene remained too occupied with doctrinal issues, Begg reached across the Atlantic to import *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed*, a book by the prominent American anti-Catholic author Edward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe.²⁰⁷ Beecher’s monograph systematically outlines a Catholic conspiracy to assume control over

²⁰³ Martin J. Mitchell, “Anti-Catholicism and the Scottish Middle Class 1800-1914,” in *Anti-Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, 1600-2000: Practices, Representations and Ideas*, edited by Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille and Geraldine Vaughan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 225.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 94.

²⁰⁵ Steve Bruce, Tony Glendinning, Iain Paterson, and Michael Rosie, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 16.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Bruce et al., *Sectarianism in Scotland*, 16; Thomas Smith, *Memoirs of James Begg*, volume 2 (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1888), c. XXXIII.

²⁰⁷ Edward Beecher, *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed; or, The Romish Corporation Dangerous to the Political Liberty and Social Interests of Man* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1856).

American institutions, including the government, the press, and higher education, which were thus on the precipice of falling under the authority of the pope, “a foreign monarch.”²⁰⁸ Penning the preface to the British edition, Begg implores his readers to approach Beecher’s claims with an open mind before they “either attempt some plausible answer to the astounding facts which it contains, or admit the overwhelming inferences which these facts irresistibly demand.”²⁰⁹ Begg naturally adopts the latter response, affirming that Beecher demonstrates “that Popery can adapt herself to any kind of institutions, and employ even a free government and unfettered press for the purpose of subverting both.”²¹⁰ For its success in impeding such tactics, Begg also praises the United States, writing that “the Protestant world is under deep obligations to America for its manly struggle against the persevering aggressions of the Romish system.”²¹¹

Begg was not the sole source of anti-Catholic conspiracism amongst the leadership of the SRS. James Aitken Wylie (1808-1890), second only to Begg in his influence over the society, and Edward Marcus Dill (1810-1862), one of the group’s top officers, each published their own versions of an anti-Catholic conspiracy theory.²¹² Revealing the true nature of the papal aggression controversy formed the focus of Wylie’s *Rome and Civil Liberty; or The Papal Aggression in its Relation to the Sovereignty of the Queen and the Independence of the Nation*.²¹³ Considering the matter in fifteen years retrospect, Wylie reiterates that the reinstatement of the Catholic hierarchy had put Britain “in very great peril.”²¹⁴ Rather than tolerating “the *religion* of

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 14-15.

²⁰⁹ James Begg, “Preface to the British Edition,” in Edward Beecher, *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed; or, The Romish Corporation Dangerous to the Political Liberty and Social Interests of Man* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1856), x.

²¹⁰ Ibid, x-xi.

²¹¹ Ibid, x.

²¹² Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade*, 160.

²¹³ J.A. Wylie, *Rome and Civil Liberty; or The Papal Aggression in its Relation to the Sovereignty of the Queen and the Independence of the Nation* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1865).

²¹⁴ Ibid, iv.

the Pope,” Britain had “sanctioned the *authority* of the Pope” and instead of allowing “the spread of another faith,” it had “permitted the erection of another Government” that would undermine British liberty if not proactively confronted: “The crisis is now; what will come is the catastrophe.”²¹⁵

Dill developed his anti-Catholic conspiracy theory by employing a broader approach comparable to Beecher’s attempt to document Rome’s multifaceted strategy of securing power by infiltrating a nation’s political, social, and cultural institutions. In *The Gathering Storm*, Dill supports “the idea of Rome conspiring to re-conquer England” by outlining a complex scheme in which the Catholic Church had devised and deployed a “*two-fold agency*” of “*Puseyites* and *Jesuits*” to infiltrate British institutions and enact a program of “*deception, violence, and corruption*.”²¹⁶ Dill sorts Rome’s subversive exploits into two spheres of influence: social and political. As “the chief sources of social influence,” Dill ostensibly exposes Catholic incursions in “the nursery, the school, the university, the pulpit, and the press.”²¹⁷ The Jesuits, for example, “notorious” as the “infamous order” that has “for years been roaming the country in every kind of guise,” are accused of effecting “their diabolical purposes” by disguising themselves as Protestant tutors and governesses.²¹⁸ In schools and universities, “Puseyites,” devotees of the Oxford Movement, then impress their Catholicizing doctrine upon “the youthful materials of our future House of Lords, our future House of Commons, and the future clergy of England’s Church,” a strategy Dill declares to be “a master-stroke of Satan.”²¹⁹ Rome’s political incursions are presented as no less pervasive. Dill claims that Catholic “agents” have managed to coerce

²¹⁵ Ibid, iv-v.

²¹⁶ Edward Marcus Dill, *The Gathering Storm, or Britain’s Romeward Career: A Warning and Appeal to British Protestants* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, & Co., 1856), 8-9.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 9.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 9-10.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

“unfaithful Protestants and tempt them to purchase Popish support at the cost of Protestant principle,” propelling papal initiatives through “our legislators, our judges, our magistrates, our governors, and our ambassadors.”²²⁰ All of these activities, Dill explains, are funded by “large sums... annually poured into Britain from Rome’s Propaganda treasury” to undermine a nation “raised up to be the defender of God’s truth and the adversary of Rome, its great foe.”²²¹

The most important catalyst for the distribution of such anti-Catholic conspiracism was the *Bulwark*, the official periodical of the SRS. The publication was launched in 1851 as a monthly dispatch directed “for the purpose of enlightening the public on the true nature and tendencies of Popery” and “to offer some resistance against the system of the Vatican.”²²² It boasted a circulation throughout England and Scotland that numbered in the tens of thousands and remains “the only religious periodical of the nineteenth century to survive to the present day.”²²³ The Protestant Alliance, which did not publish a periodical of its own, recommended the *Bulwark* to its members with Lord Shaftesbury commending it as a work “well adapted to the necessities of the times and singularly suited to the intelligence of the people.”²²⁴ Following this endorsement, the *Bulwark* came to serve “as the unofficial organ” of the Protestant Alliance, enshrining it as the principal platform for ultra-Protestant commentary.²²⁵

For its first twenty-one years and two hundred fifty issues, Begg served as the editor and “ruling spirit” of the *Bulwark*, indelibly imprinting his predisposition for anti-Catholic

²²⁰ Ibid, 18.

²²¹ Ibid, 7, 37.

²²² Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 86.

²²³ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 86; Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, “‘In Ten Years There Is an Increase of 450 Priests of Antichrist’: Quantification, Anti-Catholicism, and the *Bulwark*,” *Journal of British Studies* 56 (2017): 580-581.

²²⁴ “The Protestant Alliance,” *Times*, November 29th, 1851, 5.

²²⁵ Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, 188.

conspiracism within its pages.²²⁶ Begg used the publication to inform his vast readership of “the Vatican’s plan to reconquer Britain,” a ploy he feared was “feasible” amidst “Protestant apathy,” a “‘dumb pulpit’ and a silent press,” and “the cooperation of Puseyites.”²²⁷ During only its first year of publication, the *Bulwark* featured articles revealing clandestine Jesuit activity, exposing “the Real Object of the Pope” to be the conversion of England, and exposing the “Secret Machinery of Rome in Britain” in the form of a Jesuit group operating in Edinburgh.²²⁸ Subsequent volumes include such discourse to the point of repetition. Even in its twentieth year, the *Bulwark* remained resolute in decrying “Jesuit Tactics in England” and describing how “Rome is evidently working by her secret agents” to realize Catholic political ambitions in Britain.²²⁹

The conspiracy theories promulgated by the *Bulwark* generally follow the patterns set forth in the writings of Begg, Wylie, and Dill. One article, coauthored by Dill, warns of “that conspiracy which, directed from Rome, seeks nothing short of the entire overthrow of the Reformation in Britain.”²³⁰ Another piece details the “Progress of Rome’s Conspiracy Against Britain” by outlining four British institutions corrupted by Catholic incursions.²³¹ These now familiar claims implicate educational institutions, which “are now in the hands of Puseyites and Jesuits,” the press, including “so-called Protestant newspapers” that publish articles that “are

²²⁶ Wallis, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 86.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

²²⁸ *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal*, in *Defence of the True Interests of Man and of Society, Especially in Reference to the Religious, Social, and Political Bearings of Popery*, Volume 1 (London: Seeleys, and J. Nisbet & Co., 1852), 80, 130-131.

²²⁹ *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal*, in *Defence of the True Interests of Man and of Society, Especially in Reference to the Religious, Social, and Political Bearings of Popery*, Volume 20 (London: Seeleys, 1871), 193.

²³⁰ *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal*, in *Defence of the True Interests of Man and of Society, Especially in Reference to the Religious, Social, and Political Bearings of Popery*, Volume 3 (London: Seeleys, and J. Nisbet & Co., 1854), 220.

²³¹ *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal*, in *Defence of the True Interests of Man and of Society, Especially in Reference to the Religious, Social, and Political Bearings of Popery*, Volume 4 (London: Seeleys, Jackson, & Halliday, and J. Nisbet & Co., 1854), 270.

obviously the production of Jesuits,” the legislature, in which “a Popish brigade” is “adroitly taking advantage of the balanced state of political parties” to manipulate parliamentary politics, and “Subordinate Sources of Power,” such as “our *ambassadors*” and “our *Judges*,” who “are now to a large extent under Romish influence.”²³² The *Bulwark* also routinely attached the Oxford Movement to its conspiracy theories. For example, in 1870 edition ascribed a “New Ritualistic Church at Oxford” to the “plans of Rome” and the “action of Jesuitism.”²³³

A particularly sensational conspiracy theory was promoted in the November 1854 edition of the *Bulwark*. The article in question, “Popish Plots and Protestant Prospects,” excoriates “the diabolical attempt to murder eight hundred Protestants in Ireland.”²³⁴ This is in reference to a train derailment near Trillick in Northern Ireland. The train, which was on its highly publicized maiden trip, was carrying the officers of the Protestant Benevolent Society and the Apprentice Boys of Derry, a Protestant fraternal society and its derailment was caused “by the placing on the track of three large boulders.”²³⁵ Seven men, all Roman Catholics, were arrested and subsequently released on the basis of insufficient evidence.²³⁶ A media firestorm nonetheless ensued presuming the derailment to be the product of sectarian conflict. The *Bulwark* likened the event to the Gunpowder Plot and accused Rome of orchestrating the derailment even though “legal evidence may never be obtained... for Rome, through the confessional and otherwise, has important facilities for accomplishing her dark designs, and at the same time escaping legal detection.”²³⁷ The article thus concludes that “such a proceeding as that on the Derry Railway is in exact keeping with the policy of Rome whilst enough of evidence of a circumstantial nature

²³² Ibid, 270-271.

²³³ *The Bulwark*, Volume 20, 15.

²³⁴ Ibid, 113.

²³⁵ Desmond Fitzgerald, “The Trillick Derailment 1854,” *Clogher Record* 15 (1994): 31.

²³⁶ Ibid, 36.

²³⁷ *The Bulwark*, Volume 4, 113.

has been produced to warrant the confident conviction that to her alone that outrage must be traced.”²³⁸

Its extensive distribution and Begg’s intensive editorial oversight thus molded the *Bulwark* into one of the most prolific disseminators of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories during the mid-Victorian era. The periodical’s prominence in ultra-Protestant circles reinforced the saliency of anti-Catholic conspiracism within the movement. This additionally illustrates ultra-Protestantism’s role in proliferating anti-Catholic conspiracy theories throughout Britain as a cornerstone of its campaign to thwart an encroaching Catholic threat. As the Oxford Movement represented one such Catholicizing influence, it thereby emerged as a primary target of ultra-Protestant hostilities. In the process, ultra-Protestants became some of the most vocal antagonists of the Oxford Movement while wielding anti-Catholic conspiracy theories as a key rhetorical weapon. By the late nineteenth century, the consequences of this move will become evident as the dynamics of ultra-Protestantism’s anti-Catholic conspiracism and anti-Tractarianism culminate in the career of Walter Walsh.

Walter Walsh and *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*

Born in 1847 to working class parents in the coastal southeastern English town of Folkestone, Walter Walsh, an evangelical Anglican, was “involved in full-time protestant work early in adult life.”²³⁹ From its beginning, Walsh’s career intersected with ultra-Protestant operations. Walsh’s first position sent him to Dublin as a Protestant missionary for the Irish Church Missions (ICM).²⁴⁰ Conceived to “convert the Roman Catholics of Ireland to ‘biblical Protestantism,’” the ICM was founded in the late 1840s by the “evangelical wing of the Church

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ I.T. Foster, “Walsh, Walter,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

of England” amidst an eruption of anti-Catholic fervor.²⁴¹ The subsequent emergence of ultra-Protestantism in the 1850s bolstered the ICM, which received significant funding from ultra-Protestant organizations.²⁴² After a two year stint with the ICM, Walsh moved to Oxford in the early 1870s. He joined the Protestant Reformation Society and became involved in ultra-Protestant, anti-Catholic, and anti-ritualist initiatives, founding a branch of the anti-Tractarian Church Association and serving as a political agent for Charles Newdegate during his convent inspection campaigns.²⁴³ These experiences prepared Walsh for his emergence in the 1880s and 1890s as a leading ultra-Protestant organizer and one of its preeminent authors, publishers, and controversialists.

Walsh was instrumental in the landscape of late nineteenth century British ultra-Protestantism. His two most significant contributions to this milieu were as the founder of the Imperial Protestant Federation (IPF), which will be discussed in the next section, and as one of the movement’s most prolific and acerbic polemicists. In 1884, Walsh moved to London to join the Protestant publishing industry as the sub-editor of the *English Churchman* and editor of the *Protestant Observer* while compiling an extensive bibliography of ultra-Protestant monographs.²⁴⁴ These writings display the formative effect of ultra-Protestant rhetoric on Walsh’s convictions. In a treatise simply titled *The Ritualists*, Walsh exalts the virtues of the “Protestant Crusade” directed “against a widespread and really dangerous conspiracy to undo the achievements of the Protestant Reformation, and to bring both the Church of England and the English nation back to Papal bondage.”²⁴⁵ The Ritualists are directly implicated in this scheme

²⁴¹ Miriam Moffitt, *The Society for Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics, 1849-1959* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 1.

²⁴² Ibid, 14.

²⁴³ Foster, “Walsh, Walter.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Walter Walsh, *The Ritualists* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1900), 15.

for “the great object of the leaders, ever since the birth of the Oxford Movement, has been Corporate Reunion with Rome.”²⁴⁶ Thus the existential threat of Catholicism and, by extension, the Oxford Movement appear as persistent themes in Walsh’s corpus accompanied by an omnipresent conspiratorial flair reminiscent of previous ultra-Protestant accusations. This blend of elements is exemplified in Walsh’s most successful and influential work: *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*. In many respects, this text embodies the culmination of ultra-Protestantism’s extended indulgence in anti-Catholic conspiracy theories thereby epitomizing its most distinctive contribution to the opposition to the Oxford Movement.

That countering the Oxford Movement in all its manifestations occupied a considerable portion of Walsh’s output was a likely product of the peculiar ultra-Protestant scene Walsh first joined in the early 1870s. During this period, ultra-Protestant organizations were actively engaged in supporting an expansive political crusade against Ritualism. This effort resulted in the passage of the anti-ritualist Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874, which was introduced by Archbishop Archibald Tait and endorsed by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.²⁴⁷ Lord Shaftesbury of the Protestant Alliance was instrumental in passing this legislation. He acted as the de facto head of the “anti-ritualist lobby in the House of Lords” and leveraged this position to become as “the unofficial leader of the anti-ritualists in Parliament.”²⁴⁸ Another crucial strand of ultra-Protestant agitation during the campaign was the Church Association, of which Walsh was a leading member. This group was founded for the specific purpose of combatting the Oxford

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ For a full account of this campaign, see James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²⁴⁸ Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 222.

Movement and it subsequently played a major role in prosecuting the anti-ritualist case and rallying public support for the legislative cause.²⁴⁹

Walsh's background in anti-ritualist activity and ultra-Protestantism's proliferation of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories converged in *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*. During the 1880s, Walsh utilized his public platform to issue warnings about the "Romanizing" effect of ritualist clergy.²⁵⁰ In 1894, Walsh delivered a lecture in Edinburgh, published later that year under the title *The Secret Work of the Ritualists*, that iterated upon these proclamations and maintained their conspiratorial tone.²⁵¹ Upon this foundation, Walsh constructed an expanded version that was published with sponsorship from the Church Association in 1897 as *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*.²⁵² The work's central contention is that the Oxford Movement, from its inception, was devised as a scheme to reimpose papal tyranny over Britain by covertly compelling a reunion between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. This "secret underground conspiracy to bring back the Church of England to Rome," Walsh asserts, was pursued in cooperation with the Vatican and executed by its agents, namely disguised Jesuits and subversive Tractarians masquerading as loyal Protestants.²⁵³ Such an object was embedded within the Oxford Movement from its start and passed along to its ritualist and Anglo-Catholic heirs, thus perceived as part of one continuous "line of development."²⁵⁴

To support these contentions, Walsh draws from a vast array of sources purporting inside knowledge on Jesuit activity in Britain and connections between Tractarian leaders and Rome.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 235-236.

²⁵⁰ G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 128.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 208.

²⁵² Martin Wellings, "The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect: R.W. Church, J.H. Rigg, and Walter Walsh," *Studies in Church History* 33 (1997): 513.

²⁵³ Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, 32-34, 278.

²⁵⁴ Wellings, "The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect," 512.

After assuring the reader that he is not one to simply “see a Jesuit round every street corner,” Walsh cites Luigi Desanctis, a lapsed Catholic who joined the Waldensians, and his second-hand report that in England “there are a greater number of Jesuits than in Italy.”²⁵⁵ These Jesuits, according to Desanctis, operated in England “in all classes of society; in Parliament; *among the English clergy*” on the principle that “St. Paul became a Jew that he might save the Jews; it was no wonder, therefore, if a Jesuit should feign himself a Protestant, for the conversion of Protestants.”²⁵⁶ As we have seen, similar conceptions frequently appeared in the *Bulwark* and Walsh himself later penned a dubious history of the Jesuits in Britain.²⁵⁷

However, the Jesuits are not the sole group implicated by Walsh. *The Secret History* dedicates even more space to chronicling the Catholic sympathies of leading Tractarians, who Walsh frequently describes as “Jesuitical,” and how they proactively sought to court Rome’s partnership in their seditious ventures. Beyond relating the numerous conversions of Tractarian figures to the Catholic Church, Walsh scrutinizes a series of visits made by Oxford Movement leaders to Rome. He is particularly scandalized by Frederick Faber’s audience with the pope in 1843 in which Faber willingly followed the custom of kissing the pope’s foot: “this clergyman of the Reformed Church of England – Rome’s greatest enemy – scorned to avail himself of the proffered dispensation!”²⁵⁸ Walsh questions how Faber could thereafter “act as a Church of England clergyman,” stating that though “I do not say that Faber was at this time a Papist in disguise... if anyone came forward now and proved it I should not feel the least surprise.”²⁵⁹

Henry Manning’s 1848 trip to Rome draws similar ire. In particular, the moment he saw the

²⁵⁵ Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, 32; Luigi Desanctis, *Popery, Puseyism, Jesuitism; Described in a Series of Letters*, translated by Maria Betts, second edition (London: D. Catt, 1906).

²⁵⁶ Quoted in Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, 33.

²⁵⁷ Burstein, “In Ten Years There Is an Increase of 450 Priests of Antichrist,” 595; Walter Walsh, *The Jesuits in Great Britain: An Historical Inquiry into their Political Influence* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1903).

²⁵⁸ Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, 31.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 32.

papal carriage and “knelt down in the street before the Pope – and he all the time an Archdeacon in the Reformed Church of England!”²⁶⁰ Faber and Manning later converted to the Catholic Church. That this was typical of those in the Oxford Movement most attracted to Catholicism did not dissuade Walsh from presenting such figures as demonstrative of a deeper conspiracy. It also did not prevent Walsh from somewhat paradoxically declaring that “the wirepullers have always been opposed to *individual* secession” for “the great object of the Ritualistic Movement from its very birth, in 1833, was that of *Corporate* Reunion with the Church of Rome.”²⁶¹

In addition to highlighting Jesuit incursions and Tractarian duplicity, Walsh endeavors to unmask the Tractarian conspiracy by meticulously documenting the activities of multiple Anglo-Catholic church organizations. These groups are depicted by Walsh as “secret societies” operating to advance the Oxford Movement’s surreptitious agenda. The two primary associations so covered are the English Church Union and the Society of the Holy Cross. Walsh criticizes each under the guise of an investigative journalist. His audit is “copiously footnoted with references to official documents” such as bylaws, meeting notes, membership rolls, and private correspondence.²⁶² Some of this material was obtained by Walsh through questionable sources and methods, “including the theft of some papers of the Society of the Holy Cross from a vicarage in Gloucestershire by a Protestant posing as a ritualist.”²⁶³ Though the discretion with which Anglo-Catholic organizations operated did them few favors, Walsh shows a tendency to interpret any semblance of mystery in the most uncharitable manner possible. He thus construes confidentiality and secret practices as evidence of deception. For example, Walsh perceives insidious intent when Anglo-Catholic societies fail to disclose personal information about their

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 299.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 260.

²⁶² Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain*, 317.

²⁶³ Ibid.

members and in his discovery “that the members of the Society of the Holy Cross wore special crosses” and had a “‘secret’ greeting.”²⁶⁴

The Secret History of the Oxford Movement is thus replete with familiar conspiratorial claims presented with great political urgency regarding the ambitions of Rome. Its anti-Catholic conspiracism displays a striking resemblance to earlier ultra-Protestant output, betraying Walsh’s background and advancing the political anxieties ultra-Protestantism had harbored for decades. Walsh had thus effectively “echoed traditional Protestant polemic, reinforcing stereotypes of scheming priests and concealed Jesuits.”²⁶⁵ It should then come as little surprise that a popular edition of *The Secret History* was published by the Church Association in 1899 “at the urgent request of a large number of friends of the Protestant cause, who are anxious to bring the book within reach of the working classes.”²⁶⁶ Walsh’s preface to this edition relays that “it is hoped that many of those to whom God has given wealth will purchase large quantities for free distribution among those who cannot afford to purchase even this Popular Edition,” a task made especially important “in view of the forthcoming General Election.”²⁶⁷

Despite a mixed reception, *The Secret History* would become a tremendous success, reaching as wide a receptive audience as any previous ultra-Protestant publication. Upon release, *The Times* panned Walsh’s treatise as “little more than a violent *ex parte* fulmination against Ritualism” that “rakes up old scandals... that might well have been allowed to sleep.”²⁶⁸ More positive reviews were offered by the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review* and the *London*

²⁶⁴ J.E.B. Munson, “The Oxford Movement by the End of the Nineteenth Century: The Anglo-Catholic Clergy,” *Church History* 44 (1975): 386.

²⁶⁵ Wellings, “The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect,” 513.

²⁶⁶ Walter Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, popular edition (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1899), iii.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Times*, October 21, 1897, 3.

Quarterly Review.²⁶⁹ The latter, in lauding the book, proclaimed that “Mr. Walsh’s revelations are based on authentic, direct, original, undeniable evidence, and shows the most secret and characteristic depths and headings and windings of the Tractarian history.”²⁷⁰ As this perception gained momentum, the sales of *The Secret History* surged. Martin Wellings attributes this popularity to the “passion” with which Walsh crafted a compelling conspiracy theory narrative, the “copious documentation from printed sources and from the ‘secret’ papers of the ritualist societies” that gave weight to his theory, and the sensational title he chose, which “served to promote interest, being ‘redolent of intrigue, of backstairs influence, of cipher letters and disguised emissaries.’”²⁷¹

The Secret History thus gained acclaim as “a bestseller, reaching a fifth edition within sixteen months.”²⁷² Walsh was even named a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society based on the strength of the volume’s success.²⁷³ This ascending trajectory is reflected in the pages of the Anglo-Catholic *Church Times*. Initially, the *Church Times* dismissed *The Secret History* “as absurd, irreligious, and untrue” in but a single short review.²⁷⁴ Within a year, this scope of coverage had increased in tandem with the work’s popularity as the *Church Times* “devoted three articles to detailed refutation.”²⁷⁵ These pieces were compiled and separately published as *A Protestant Mare’s Nest*, which opens with the admittance that “we did not notice this absurd book at any length when it first appeared” for “we did not think it worth powder and shot.”²⁷⁶ However, as Walsh’s screed “has been hawked about as an authority... quoted in the House of

²⁶⁹ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921*, 235.

²⁷⁰ *The London Quarterly Review*, volume 90 (London: C.H. Kelly, 1898), 223.

²⁷¹ Wellings, “The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect,” 513.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 512.

²⁷³ *Ibid*.

²⁷⁴ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921*, 235.

²⁷⁵ Wellings, “The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect,” 514.

²⁷⁶ *A Protestant Mare’s Nest: An Examination of Mr. Walsh’s Book “The Secret History of the Oxford Movement,”* (London: Office of “The Church Times,” 1898), 3.

Commons” and “apparently found a sale,” the *Church Times* became convinced that it required a thorough critique upon the principle that “it is never safe to under-rate the force of stupidity, and the silliest of arguments, if ignored, may loudly proclaim itself unanswered.”²⁷⁷ Walsh had thus thrust ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracy theories into the center of the sociopolitical zeitgeist and the discourse surrounding the legacy of the Oxford Movement.

Walsh’s insistence that Catholicism represented an existential threat not only as a potent ecclesiastical rival to the Church of England but also as a political entity with tyrannical designs for Britain soundly positions him within the tradition of his ultra-Protestant forebears. His warnings of clandestine Jesuit agents and Catholicizing Tractarians, as we have seen, were modeled by earlier ultra-Protestant rhetoric. Even the proposition that the Oxford Movement concealed a Catholic conspiracy had appeared in multiple pamphlets during the early 1890s.²⁷⁸ What distinguished Walsh’s opus then was not its content, unprecedented though it was in the scope and exhaustion of its subject, nor its broader accusations, dramatic though they were, but its success, its influence, and its subsequent impact. In these facets, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* embodied the pinnacle of ultra-Protestant polemic, one that brought forth its anti-Catholic conspiracism and firmly embedded it at the center of a renewed era of opposition to the Oxford Movement.

The Great Church Crisis and the Impact of Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories

On March 17th, 1899, a striking letter by an evangelical Anglican clergyman named Anthony Ramsden Cavalier appeared in an edition of the *Times*.²⁷⁹ The letter is prefaced by a statement declaring the intent of its publication to be “in order that parents may be put on their

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Wellings, “The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect,” 513.

²⁷⁹ *Times*, March 17, 1899, 12.

guard against the secret working of Ritualists amongst the young.”²⁸⁰ A.R. Cavalier’s narrative follows. He details a dramatic series of events in which his son, who he was preparing for ordination, was indoctrinated by ritualist clergy to the effect that “his prospects are destroyed, his moral tone lowered, and his sense of right and wrong impaired.”²⁸¹ This story incited an intense public outcry as letters in support of A.R. Cavalier poured into the *Times*, which dutifully published many, and the matter was raised in the House of Lords as indicative of “the inadequacies of episcopal policy with respect to the ‘crisis in the Church.’”²⁸² This crisis in the Church, hereafter referred to as the Great Church Crisis or simply the Church Crisis, refers to a prolonged conflict between the Protestant and Anglo-Catholic parties of the Church of England that occupied Britain’s ecclesiastical and sociopolitical discourse from roughly 1898 to 1906.²⁸³ The Church Crisis fostered a period defined “by agitation and polarisation” that represented a pinnacle of ultra-Protestant activity and political stature.²⁸⁴ Within this context, ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracism consequently came to animate parliamentary debates, incite ecclesiastical hostilities, and inform policy decisions in Britain and its colonies.

Bethany Kilcrease identifies three instigating incidents that fostered “a sense of crisis about the growth of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England and the growing assertiveness of Roman Catholicism from outside.”²⁸⁵ These three events, thus delineated by Kilcrease as the principal causes of the Great Church Crisis, were the publication of Walter Walsh’s *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, Sir William Harcourt’s alarmist parliamentary speeches against Ritualism, and John Kensit’s (1853-1902) inflammatory anti-

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Martin Wellings, “Anglo-Catholicism, the ‘Crisis in the Church’ and the Cavalier Case of 1899,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991): 245-246.

²⁸³ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*.

²⁸⁴ Wellings, “Anglo-Catholicism, the ‘Crisis in the Church’ and the Cavalier Case of 1899,” 242-243.

²⁸⁵ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 1.

ritualist protests.²⁸⁶ Notably, *The Secret History* inspired the actions of both Harcourt and Kensit, thereby positioning Walsh as the prime mover of the Church Crisis. Walsh's book also precipitated a deluge of anti-Catholic publications and reinvigorated ultra-Protestant societies, including the Protestant Alliance and the Scottish Reformation Society, which set to work organizing a flurry of meetings and anti-ritualist protests.²⁸⁷

A contemporary eruption of interest in the contested legacy of the Oxford Movement also played a formative role in the emergence of the Great Church Crisis. From the mid-1880s, "interest in the history of the Oxford Movement began to revive as ritualism grew more aggressive and as aging tractarians and their opponents began to write autobiographies and memoirs recalling the movement."²⁸⁸ Subsequently, the literary market of the 1890s became inundated with volumes recounting and assessing the Oxford Movement.²⁸⁹ This environment both aided and highlighted the growing strength of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England while also arousing a renewed backlash against it. The 1890s thus saw a revival of public interest in Tractarianism significant enough to induce a discernable "second wave of Protestant reaction to the Oxford Movement."²⁹⁰ Most of the doctrinal concerns that energized the initial opposition to the Oxford Movement, detailed in the first chapter, were shared by the second. However, this second wave, led by ultra-Protestant figures such as Walsh and Kensit, diverged from the first in its preoccupation with anti-Catholic conspiracy theories. The roots of

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 1-2.

²⁸⁷ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 235.

²⁸⁸ Bethany Tanis, "Diverging Paths: *Fin-de-Siècle* Britishness and the Oxford Movement," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 77 (2008): 296.

²⁸⁹ Tanis, "Diverging Paths," 296; Wellings, "The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect."

²⁹⁰ Tanis, "Diverging Paths," 296.

the Church Crisis thus simultaneously laid “in the influential Oxford or Tractarian Movement” and the conspiratorial milieu of late nineteenth century ultra-Protestantism.²⁹¹

The peculiarities of the Cavalier case exemplify the tenor of the Great Church Crisis while illustrating how ultra-Protestant conspiracism, as channeled through Walsh’s work, came to shape the conflict and define broader Protestant perceptions of Anglo-Catholicism. As Martin Wellings explains, A.R. Cavalier’s accusation that ritualist clergy operated in a “clandestine nature” to convert his son located the affair within “a broader framework of conspiracy associated with ritualism.”²⁹² That the Cavalier case and its “theme of secrecy and deception” resonated profoundly within the zeitgeist of the Church Crisis demonstrates that, through “the efforts of Walter Walsh” and his “revelations about secret societies,” a “motif of mystery and deliberate deception” had become “powerful in Protestant imagination.”²⁹³ Wellings therefore concludes that “the deceitful ritualist joined the scheming Jesuit as a character of Protestant folklore” to forge an impression “that the Church of England was honeycombed with organisations pursuing their own ends in a clandestine and generally suspicious fashion.”²⁹⁴ This fear, drawn from *The Secret History*, fueled the Church Crisis. The anti-Catholic conspiracy theories that ultra-Protestants had long proliferated thus came via Walsh’s endeavors to centrally occupy Protestant discourse and embody skeptical perceptions of the Oxford Movement and its successors.

The influence of this dynamic is most evident in the two events inspired by *The Secret History* that Kilcrease locates alongside it as the most crucial propellants of the Great Church Crisis: Harcourt’s parliamentary campaign and Kensit’s protests. Harcourt made his attitudes

²⁹¹ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 2.

²⁹² Wellings, “Anglo-Catholicism, the ‘Crisis in the Church’ and the Cavalier Case of 1899,” 246-247.

²⁹³ Ibid, 246.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

towards Anglo-Catholicism and his reception of Walsh's conspiracy theory known in a series of articles he wrote for the *Times* that were later compiled and published in 1899 under the evocative title *Lawlessness in the National Church*.²⁹⁵ In these writings, Harcourt routinely warns of "the conspiracy of the 'Catholic Revival.'" ²⁹⁶ This conspiracy, he asserts, "is widely spread and deeply laid, carrying on its work not only by public violation of the law but through the machinery of secret societies."²⁹⁷ As such language indicates, Harcourt often cites Walsh's opus to back his claims. For example, when pressing the urgent need to counter an attempt "to assimilate in every particular the practice and the creed of the Church of England to those of the Church of Rome," Harcourt invokes "the secret societies and guilds which Mr. Walsh has exposed" as leading this "open and avowed Romanizing campaign."²⁹⁸

As the leader of the Liberal party, it naturally follows that Harcourt, alongside fellow Liberal MP Samuel Smith, would bring Walsh's allegations before Parliament and attempt to initiate legislative action "to protect the Protestantism of the Church of England."²⁹⁹ Harcourt's role in the Great Church Crisis was preceded by decades of anti-ritualist political activity dating back to his support for the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874.³⁰⁰ After his extraordinary 1898 parliamentary speech on the threat of an Anglo-Catholic conspiracy, detailed at the beginning of this chapter, Harcourt, a sizable contingent of Liberal politicians that included future Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and a few Conservatives asserted Ritualism as a central parliamentary concern.³⁰¹

²⁹⁵ William Vernon-Harcourt, *Lawlessness in the National Church*, Reprinted from *The Times* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899).

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 107.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 139.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 22-23.

²⁹⁹ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 63.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 65-66.

³⁰¹ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 237-238.

During the Church Crisis, the question of Ritualism thus occupied parliamentary discussions to an extent that even eclipsed its magnitude in the early 1870s.³⁰² Smith argued that “the Protestant laity of the Church of England had no redress against their own priests ‘except by coming to Parliament.’”³⁰³ A series of church discipline bills designed “to facilitate the removal of ritualist incumbents” were subsequently introduced.³⁰⁴ However, although such a proposal “turned into one of the major domestic issues of the General Election of 1900,” the Liberal minority would fail to secure the passage of anything more than an amendment affirming that “if the current efforts of Archbishops and Bishops were not speedily effectual, legislation would be required.”³⁰⁵ Annual unsuccessful attempts to pass a version of the church discipline bill continued through 1911, keeping the issue of Ritualism alive in Parliament where it would remain relevant through the Prayer Book Crisis of the late 1920s.³⁰⁶

In addition to that of Walsh, another name heralded before Parliament during Harcourt and Smith’s anti-ritualist diatribes was that of John Kensit, whose belligerent actions against ritualist services were trumpeted by Smith as “the beginning of a great revolution.”³⁰⁷ Kensit’s background in publishing ultra-Protestant educational materials precipitated his founding of the Protestant Truth Society (PTS) in 1890 as an organization initially dedicated to “the extensive circulation of Protestant literature.”³⁰⁸ Within a few years, the PTS had gradually expanded its activities as it “began to venture into ritualist parishes” where it would host “public meetings and

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 60.

³⁰⁴ Wellings, “Anglo-Catholicism, the ‘Crisis in the Church’ and the Cavalier Case of 1899,” 242.

³⁰⁵ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 61; Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 245-246.

³⁰⁶ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 237.

³⁰⁷ Hansard lix, 470.

³⁰⁸ Quoted in Martin Wellings, “The First Protestant Martyr of the Twentieth Century: The Life and Significance of John Kensit (1853-1902),” *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993): 350.

services on unsympathetic territory.”³⁰⁹ These anti-ritualist demonstrations soon evolved into a large-scale, nationwide protest campaign under Kensit’s leadership.

This crusade began a month after the publication of Walsh’s *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* before erupting in full force during the spring of 1898.³¹⁰ The model for the Kensitite protests was set by its inciting incident: Kensit’s antagonistic return to his birth parish, St Ethelburga’s, Bishopsgate, which was served by an Anglo-Catholic curate.³¹¹ Kensit’s truculent presence incited a controversy that climaxed with protests during church services and a lawsuit “for the removal of a tabernacle and crucifixes from the church.”³¹² Such patterns of activity quickly spread across London, particularly during Holy Week 1898 when Kensit spearheaded protests in Anglo-Catholic parishes throughout the city. At St Mark’s, Marylebone Road, for example, Kensit attended a service during which “he rose from his seat and protested against ‘this monstrous service, which is not in the Book of Common Prayer,’ and disorder ensued.”³¹³ At the Good Friday service at St Cuthbert’s, Philbeach Gardens, during the veneration of the cross “Kensit reportedly seized the crucifix and said, ‘In the name of God I denounce this idolatry in the Church of England; God help me.’”³¹⁴ He had to be forcefully removed from the church by police who arrested and fined him £3 for brawling.³¹⁵

Each such disruption gained Kensit a robust following. His disturbances turned out sympathetic crowds who would await his eviction from the services he interrupted to receive a galvanizing address.³¹⁶ Kensit’s supporters proceeded to replicate his tactics in a pervasive

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Wellings, “The Oxford Movement in Late-Nineteenth-Century Retrospect,” 513.

³¹¹ Wellings, “The First Protestant Martyr of the Twentieth Century,” 351.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 240.

³¹⁴ Wellings, “The First Protestant Martyr of the Twentieth Century,” 352.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 240.

agitation campaign. This continued until May 1898 when Kensit, while wielding the “threat of simultaneous protests in 1,000 churches,” suspended his operations to facilitate an agreement with Bishop Mandell Creighton, who promised to present a petition against “the growth of Catholic beliefs and practices in the Church” to the Anglican Convocation.³¹⁷ When this move failed to produce satisfactory results, Kensit unleashed an organized band of thirty “Wycliffite” preachers who toured throughout England speaking against Ritualism and “disturbing church services of which they did not approve.”³¹⁸ Within a year, these “Wycliffites” had visited “some 441 towns, holding 2,561 meetings and distributing 200,137 pamphlets.”³¹⁹

Kensit “sustained his crusade against ritualism” through the end of the century.³²⁰ He did so by continuing to disrupt church services, protesting at the ordinations of Anglo-Catholic priests, addressing Protestant rallies, and “denouncing the bishops in the press and even from the platform of the Church Congress.”³²¹ Kensit persisted in his anti-ritualist struggle until it led to his death in 1902 after he was hit by a thrown iron file during a protest in Liverpool.³²² The loss of its leader did not stymie the Kensit crusade. Rather, “Kensit’s death caused renewed determination to continue his movement” under the leadership of his son, J.A. Kensit, who assumed the position with Walsh’s recommendation.³²³ The anti-ritualist protests thus continued in earnest and with global recognition. A 1904 *New York Times* article carrying the headline “Panic in Westminster Abbey: Adherent of John Kensit Explodes Fire Cracker in Church and Escapes” provides but one indicative example.³²⁴ J.A. Kensit also picked up the ultra-Protestant

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Munson, “The Oxford Movement by the End of the Nineteenth Century,” 385.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Wellings, “The First Protestant Martyr of the Twentieth Century,” 352.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid, 347.

³²³ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921*, 252-253.

³²⁴ *The New York Times*, September 12, 1904, 1.

tradition of espousing anti-Catholic conspiracy theories. For instance, his 1918 treatise *Rome Behind the Great War*, which was published by the PTS, accused the Catholic Church of orchestrating the First World War.³²⁵ If Walsh had provided the content for the Great Church Crisis, John Kensit acted as its “most effective spokesman,” one who “made a considerable impact on the political and ecclesiastical scene.”³²⁶

Walsh’s influence during the Great Church Crisis, and in the ultra-Protestant cause more generally, were not limited to his writings. Perhaps as significant was his work as an organizer. In this regard, Walsh’s most important contribution was the Imperial Protestant Federation (IPF). Successfully constituted in 1898, the IPF was the result of Walsh’s efforts “to form a federation of Protestant societies.”³²⁷ The purpose of the IPF, as defined in its constitution, was thus “to federate Evangelical Protestant Churches and Societies within the British Empire” to foster cooperation and facilitate “any action required for the protection or advancement of Protestant interests.”³²⁸ On this basis, the IPF was a rousing success. It boasted 1.6 million members at its height, a staggering number relative to the mere tens of thousands reported by the combined memberships of the Protestant Alliance and the Scottish Reformation Society.³²⁹ This number was achieved by the Federation through its oversight of 57 affiliated Protestant associations that operated over 2,000 branches throughout the British Empire.³³⁰ Outside of the British Isles, “‘white’ settler colonies” such as Canada and Australasia hosted the largest share of such bodies, but the IPF also claimed to have an active presence in “the West Indies, India, Burma, South

³²⁵ J.A. Kensit, *Rome Behind the Great War* (London: Protestant Truth Society, 1918).

³²⁶ Wellings, “The First Protestant Martyr of the Twentieth Century,” 352.

³²⁷ John Wolfe, “Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire, 1815-1914,” in *Empires of Religion*, edited by Hilary Carey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 51.

³²⁸ Included in Arthur Galton, *Our Attitude Towards English Roman Catholics, and the Papal Court* (London: Protestant Reformation Society, 1902), 157.

³²⁹ Geraldine Vaughan, *Anti-Catholicism and British Identities in Britain, Canada and Australia, 1880s-1920s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 34.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Africa, Ceylon, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta, Newfoundland, Singapore, and the Straits Settlements.”³³¹

As the vast geographical scope of the IPF indicates, Walsh and his fellow ultra-Protestants had come to view their war against Catholicism from an imperial perspective. Rome’s conspiracy to extend its tyranny over Britain thus also involved British colonies. One manifestation of this “ongoing paranoia surrounding a Roman conquest of the State” that emerged in multiple British colonies was the perception of an “overrepresentation of Catholics in public office.”³³² For example, in Ontario the IPF affiliated Protestant Protective Association anxiously claimed that “25% of civil servants were of the papist confession whereas they represented only a sixth of the general population.”³³³ This observation fueled fears “that there was a spoils system in favour of Catholics in the public service” that could only be explained as the mechanism of a subversive plot, prompting the IPF to mobilize militant campaigns against “the local involvement of Catholics in elected councils” throughout the empire.³³⁴

Seeing Britain’s imperial position as an instrument to expand Protestantism on a global scale, ultra-Protestants believed that domestic vulnerabilities to Catholic political ambitions thus bore international consequences. Walsh summarized this position in the popular edition of *The Secret History*: “should the Ritualists succeed, we should have again a Roman Catholic King of England,” giving “the Pope of Rome” power over not only Britain, but also over the whole “British Empire in temporals as well as spirituals.”³³⁵ Rome usurping authority over Britain would, by extension, erode the capabilities of Protestants to contest the expansion of Catholicism

³³¹ Vaughan, *Anti-Catholicism and British Identities*, 20-21; Wolffe, “Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire,” 53.

³³² Vaughan, *Anti-Catholicism and British Identities*, 93.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid, 93-94.

³³⁵ Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, popular edition, 255.

throughout the world. Many British anti-Catholics thus conceived the British Empire to be a providential force that maintained an international Protestant bastion against Catholic corruption.³³⁶

Ultra-Protestants consequently viewed the Catholicizing influence of the Oxford Movement as a grave threat that endangered Britain's divine mission. One example in which we see this dynamic is the ultra-Protestant interpretation of the Second Boer War (1899-1902). As Kilcrease contends, "the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War in October 1899 helped to further radicalize the anti-Ritualist Protestant subculture."³³⁷ The reason for this was that ultra-Protestants "often interpreted the early British defeats in South Africa as divine punishment for permitting the spread of Catholicism within the Established Church," both in Britain and in South Africa.³³⁸ Britain's stature, its "riches and empire," would thus persist "only as long as they remained firmly Protestant, fighting God's battle against His enemies."³³⁹ Defending Britain's Protestant identity thus became a central commitment of the IPF.

The Federation's greatest achievement on this front came from its successful rallying of Protestant opposition against a proposed alteration to the Accession Declaration. This issue emerged following Edward VIII's accession to the throne in 1901. Concerns were raised that the Declaration, an oath to preserve Protestant succession taken by the new monarch before Parliament, used outdated and unnecessarily vitriolic anti-Catholic language, such as a commitment to reject "superstitious and idolatrous" Catholic practices.³⁴⁰ Propositions to alter such terminology were vigorously opposed by the IPF. The ultra-Protestant network

³³⁶ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire," 44.

³³⁷ Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis*, 7.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Tanis, "Diverging Paths," 301.

³⁴⁰ Quoted in Vaughan, *Anti-Catholicism and British Identities*, 78.

subsequently deployed its resources to mount an extensive effort to defend the Declaration's Protestant framing as an essential safeguard against Catholic political conspiracies. This offensive included "circulating 'hundreds of thousands' of pamphlets and leaflets 'all over the British dominions.'"³⁴¹ A pamphlet written by Walsh and titled *A Defense of the King's Protestant Declaration* was one of most widely distributed.³⁴² Walsh employed reliable ultra-Protestant conspiratorial rhetoric to justify the Declaration as a necessary bulwark against Rome's "great political machine," which might otherwise receive an exploitable path towards seizing the British crown.³⁴³ The substantial opposition marshaled by the IPF through public meetings and petitioning drives across the empire led the government "to decide quietly to drop its attempts to change the Declaration."³⁴⁴

This accomplishment was short lived, the Accession Declaraion Act (1910) was passed nearly a decade later, but it nonetheless shows the political influence the IPF and ultra-Protestants were able to wield during the span of the Great Church Crisis. Ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic polemic not only retained its conspiracism during this period, but was centrally defined by it. The work that instigated the Great Church Crisis and delineated the boundaries of its discourse was Walsh's *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, which interwove anti-Catholic and anti-Tractarian conspiracy theories to potent effect. The Great Church Crisis and the ultra-Protestant ventures it fostered thus concomitantly demonstrate the ascendance of anti-Catholic conspiracy theories in the opposition to the Oxford Movement and the enduring influence of popular anti-Catholicism in late nineteenth century Britain.

³⁴¹ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire," 52.

³⁴² Walter Walsh, *A Defense of the King's Protestant Declaration* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901).

³⁴³ Ibid, 17.

³⁴⁴ Wolffe, "Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire," 53.

Conclusion

The anti-Catholic conspiracism cultivated and proliferated by ultra-Protestantism over the latter half of the nineteenth century fundamentally transformed the opposition to the Oxford Movement. As we have seen, this conspiratorial rhetoric can be continuously traced from the ultra-Protestant response to the papal aggression controversy, through the subsequent polemical exhibitions of leading ultra-Protestant figures and organizations, and up to the culmination and most popular expression of this tradition in Walter Walsh's *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*. The influence and impact of Walsh's conspiracy theory in the Great Church Crisis and its remarkable similarities to earlier examples of ultra-Protestant conspiracism exemplifies the dramatic degree to which anti-Catholic conspiracy theories had come to occupy the opposition to the Oxford Movement by the end of the nineteenth century. Ultra-Protestantism's emergence as the most prominent element of that opposition is the most compelling explanation for how this development unfolded.

Conclusion

Ultra-Protestantism profoundly reconfigured the opposition to the Oxford Movement through its anti-Catholic conspiracism. Initially, this opposition focused on advancing doctrinal critiques. Amidst the rise of ultra-Protestantism, this doctrinal focus was displaced by an anti-Catholic conspiracism rooted in persistent prejudice and informed by a rich history of anti-Jesuit conspiracism in Britain. By the end of the nineteenth century, ultra-Protestants had elevated anti-Catholic conspiracy theories to a core feature of the opposition to the Oxford Movement. This development precipitated a prolonged controversy, the Great Church Crisis, that saw political and ecclesiastical forces embroiled in a conflict over the legacy of the Oxford Movement that only widened the receptive audience of ultra-Protestantism's conspiratorial rhetoric. Consequently, anti-Catholic conspiracy theories came to exercise an acute influence upon ecclesiastical disputes and parliamentary debates mediating the long-term reception of the Oxford Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The anti-Catholic conspiracy theories disseminated by ultra-Protestants share a constellation of common characteristics and assertions. Foremost amongst these is the conviction that Catholicism is inherently undemocratic, antagonistic to religious and civic liberty, and politically ambitious. The Roman Catholic Church is thus seen to be an existential threat to British political and religious sovereignty, one that is intent on subjugating Britain to its tyrannical designs. Towards this end, ultra-Protestant conspiracy theories postulated that Rome was actively waging a subversive campaign to infiltrate and usurp Britain's social, political, and religious institutions. These activities were attributed to disguised Jesuit agents and subversive Tractarian collaborators.

Through such conceptualizations, ultra-Protestants connected their anti-Catholic conspiracy theories to their attacks against Tractarianism. This move was executed with most significance by Walter Walsh in *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*. Walsh's *Secret History* both exemplified the pervasive ultra-Protestant anti-Catholic conspiracism that precipitated it and embodied the culmination of this oeuvre as its most influential and impactful permutation. The success of Walsh's work catapulted the distinctive conspiratorial polemic of ultra-Protestantism to a place of unprecedented prominence as it came to define British anti-Catholicism and anti-Tractarianism by the end of the nineteenth century. Ultra-Protestantism thus fundamentally transformed the opposition to the Oxford Movement by amplifying the stature of anti-Catholic conspiracism across Britain's sociopolitical landscape.

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