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“Babylon Fallen”. British attitudes to Catholicism in the mid 19th Century : the reaction of William Arthur and William Gladstone to the Irish and Italian contexts shaping British evangelical responses.

This paper was conceived in Oxford over 30 years ago when I had just returned from a spell of covering for our mission partner at Ponte Sant` Angelo Methodist Church in Rome during the summer vacation at Wesley College; that was just before coming to set up the Wesley and Methodist Studies Centre (WMSC) at Westminster College as its first Director. It was in Rome that I fostered an interest in Methodist-Catholic relationships and our inter relationship with the Waldensians. Then here in Oxford I developed as my primary interest the focus in my doctoral studies on the attitudes of Wesley and the Methodists to poverty and issues of social justice in Methodism. As well as my other interest (inevitably) in Methodist education, particularly higher education, the love of Charles Wesley` s hymns and liturgy and worship (albeit revised and reformed) and their sacramental theology, and Methodist heritage and contemporary mission, these have all framed my rather unfocussed research profile over the years, shaped by the needs of teaching and research and the missional imperatives and practical demands of the Church in an age of change. As a consequence, the topic for this paper was hard to choose and difficult to place. But by happenstance I am here back where I have been in the past with Historical Studies rather than the Ecumenism working group to which I was assigned and attended at the last Institute. I hope all this lengthy preamble sets out my context, as a theological educator and church historian, a practicing Methodist presbyter in mainly ecumenical settings, and enthusiast for Methodist heritage and mission. That apologia pro vita mea is by way of explaining the different strands which may come through a paper which is not purely historical but representative of tangential and overlapping interests.

The second thing to say from the start is that it marks a development from the 30 plus years ago when, imbued in the spirit of the Roman encounters

and the reading of David Butler`s book *Methodists and Papists*¹ I wrote a paper (entitled *Pure Universal Love*²) for a conference sponsored by the WMSC on inter faith relationships. This appeared first as a paper in the Westminster Wesley Series No.3 of that year but then was revised and offered at a conference in Melbourne, Australia, honouring the life and work of Professor Norman Young on his 80th birthday and the 50th year of his ordained ministry and appearing in his festschrift in 2013.³ He was a long and faithful servant of this OIMTS and a mentor of mine when he taught at Wesley College Bristol. But in the intervening years, my rather enthusiastic and positive spin on Wesley as a proto-ecumenist based on his primary texts of *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* and the sermon on *The Catholic Spirit* has been modified to take a more serious look at what sadly was a legacy of anti-Catholicism from the 18th century, despite Wesley`s readings of and encounters with Catholics whom he read and admired. This is a subject which David Chapman more recently has explored in his magisterial treatment of Catholic and Methodist relationships, *In Search of the Catholic Spirit*.⁴

Maybe in the spirit of our theme for this OIMTS *The World is My Parish: Glad Tidings of Salvation in an Age of Crisis*, it is well for contemporary Methodists and those in Wesleyan-related communities to heed the pastoral challenges faced by our ancestors in the 19th century who sought to offer this gospel of salvation in troubled times in which they deemed to be threatened by the resurgence of Catholicism and the emergence of Socialism in an era of hopeful Protestant advances. The nascent anti-Catholicism endemic in these islands bred a bigotry and hostility equal to that experienced in continental Europe by our Protestant cousins, whether they were Waldensians or Moravians, or heirs of the radical Reformation, forced to flee as religious refugees to the so-called

¹ David Butler, *Methodists and Papists*,: John Wesley and the Catholic Church in the Eighteenth Century. DLT, 1995

² **Pure Universal Love : Reflections on the Wesleys and Inter-faith dialogue**, an article on *John Wesley`s Practice of Intra-Faith Love*, Westminster Wesley Series No.3, Summer 1995, ed. Tim Macquiban, pp.35-43.

³ in “IMMENSE, UNFATHOMED, UNCONFINED: THE GRACE OF GOD IN CREATION, CHURCH AND COMMUNITY. **“Names, and sects, and parties fall...” : The Wesleys’ Practice of Intra-Faith Love, UAP, 2013**

⁴ David M. Chapman, *In search of the Catholic Spirit*

`New World` to export both the quest for religious liberty and the fierce defence of Protestant beliefs as against Catholicism.

I want us to set the scene in the 1830 and 1840s, first by looking at some of the commentators who have surveyed the period after the Wesleys, and then looking in some more detail at this fascinating and rare volume lent to me by my good friend and bibliophile Colin Smith, a member and officer of this OIMTS. Its short title is *O`Connell and the Wesleyans*.⁵ It sets out in polemical style in a series of letters a fierce response to the attack by Daniel O`Connell, MP and Irish nationalist extraordinaire, on Manchester Wesleyan Methodists on the subject of National Education. It concludes with a poem entitled *Babylon Fallen*, all written by Daniel McAfee, a Wesleyan Methodist minister then serving in 1839 in the city of Cork and the surrounding area in Southern Ireland. He was himself an Ulsterman from Northern Ireland.

As Colin Haydon`s article in the *Oxford Handbook of Early Evangelicalism* ⁶sets out, No Popery was a recurring rallying call for evangelicals of the Revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain and the Americas, framed often by the Irish dimension and reactions to the resurgent Catholic Counter Reformation with its aggressive missions, fuelled by Jesuit and other zeal for education and reconversions. That Foxe`s *Book of Martyrs* went into so many reprints ⁷ and Henry Moore, the Wesleyan minister`s *History of Persecutions of the Church of Rome* (1810?) featured in many household libraries (along with the Bible, the Hymnal and Bunyan`s *Pilgrim`s Progress*) is indicative of the abiding anti-Catholic narrative which framed Protestant identity with its familiar catalogue of Papal errors and Popish flaws deviating from Scriptural Truths. ⁸ The centrality of the bible for evangelicals made the ignorance of the scriptures amongst Catholics their primary concern and chief weapon in the attack upon the Papacy. But other aspects of Catholicism also featured which were condemned as unscriptural; these included worship of images, saints as

⁵ *O`Connell and the Wesleyans: the Calumnies, Falsehoods, and Religion of O`Connell Exposed, and Protestantism Defended in seven letters. With Babylon Fallen, a poem in 32 stanzas, and an Appendix, containing O`Connell`s Letters, by Daniel M`Afee*

⁶ Chapter 19 of the *Oxford Handbook on Early Evangelicalism*, ed Jonathan Yeager, OUP 2022, by Colin Haydon on Anti-Catholicism

⁷ E R Norman in his *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, Allen and Unwin, 1967, p.13 refers to the 1875 reprint with graphic pictures of the St. Bartholemew`s Day massacre 400 years earlier

⁸ Haydon, p.391

mediators, Mariolatry, clerical celibacy, and the doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation. By pointing out that the Letter to a Roman Catholic (1749) was only reprinted three times in Wesley`s lifetime unlike other more extensive print runs, Haydon seeks to limit Wesley`s view of Roman Catholicism and to balance his limited use of Catholic sources with his other anti-Catholic rhetoric, notably in Popery Calmly Considered (1779).⁹ Significantly and paradoxically this comes close to the heightened tensions between Protestants and Catholics which resulted in the Gordon Riots of 1780. John Newton, the evangelical hymn writer, called these `a reproach to our national character`, by which he meant the seeming abandonment of tolerance and the protection of civil and religious liberties which the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had ushered in. Wesley`s possible condoning of the riots and the support of Methodism for these remains an open question.

It was the Achilles` heel of Evangelical anti-Catholicism, as was enthusiasm for the cause of Napoleonic anticlericalism and the humiliation of the Papacy and the despoliation of Catholic Churches and Monasteries during the French Revolution. The legacy of this was a Toryism which infected both Anglicans and Dissenters in its anti-Catholicism seeking to limit religious freedom. This city of Oxford was divided as the 1829 election degenerated in fierce controversy over the Catholic Relief Bill proposed by the Peelites. It was won by the opponent of Peel and the No Popery slogan carved into the doors of Christ Church at the heart of the Anglican establishment bears witness to this day of the abiding legacy of anti-Catholicism.

Chapman highlights the opposition to Catholics as a unifying factor amongst the divided Protestant Dissenters and Methodists. Quoting Professor David Hempton (himself a Northern Irishman), the point is made that Wesley`s anti-Catholicism was `one of his profound and enduring legacies to the Wesleyan Connexion, and the Connexion`s vigorous anti-Catholicism was a most important determinant of Wesleyan political attitudes during the 19th century`. ¹⁰ Despite the more eirenic injunctions of the 1820 Liverpool Wesleyan Conference in the wake of the Peterloo massacre and fears of radical activity, the pious clauses rang hollow

⁹ Haydon, p.397

¹⁰ Chapman p.46 quoting David Hempton in Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850 pp.42ff).

amidst heightened tensions in Ireland and the industrial cities with a significant Irish immigrant presence; Methodists were exhorted to

‘ Avoid a narrow, bigoted and sectarian spirit, to abstain from needless and unprofitable disputes on minor subjects of theological controversy ...

Let us maintain towards all denominations of Christians who hold the Head (Christ), the kind and catholic spirit of primitive Methodism and be ‘ friends of all and enemies of none ‘ .

It seems the aspirations were rather greater than the reality of inter religious relationships in Britain and Ireland. Take one example of it here in Oxford. The Martyrs’ Memorial ¹¹ a monument at the intersection of St. Giles and Beaumont Street opposite Balliol College. It is very near the spot where the execution of the Protestant Martyrs, of Bishops Latimer and Ridley in October 1555 and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in March 1556, took place. With funds raised by wealthy and prominent evangelical Anglicans and others, this impressive neo-Gothic monument styled by George Gilbert Scott to resemble an Eleanor Cross , was planned in 1838 and erected between 1841 and 1843 at a time of raised concerns about the catholicization of the Church of England by John Keble, Edward Pusey (he of Tracts for the Times) and John Henry Newman in what became known as the Oxford Movement. The Martyrs’ Memorial was a robust riposte to these developments and a rallying call to Protestant England in defending its religious principles. Some were prepared to go no further in the extension of civil and religious rights after a period of Whig reforms sweeping away some of the vestiges of the status quo and Tory control of the Establishment, of Church and State.

Daniel O’ Connell and Daniel M’ Afee and differing Irish perspectives on Roman Catholicism

And so we come to the contents of the O’ Connell pamphlet Colin Smith has helpfully unearthed in assisting us to set the context of anti-Catholicism in the 1830s. Daniel M’ Afee was a Wesleyan minister then stationed in Cork who decides to set out ‘ the calumnies, falsehoods and religion of [Daniel] O’ Connell expos’ d and Protestantism Defended’ in an exchange of letters with the MP. The incident that had provoked the wrath

¹¹ See Wikipedia article for basic history

of M`Afee on behalf of Irish Wesleyan Methodists was O`Connell`s attack on a group of Methodists in Manchester who had ventured to enter the wider debate on `the National System of Education in England.`

Edward Royle has argued in a paper also presented to a conference here in Oxford, at Westminster College, in 2002, entitled *Vital Piety and Learning: Methodism and Education*¹² that responses to and attitudes towards education were a badge of denominational image and identity. There had long persisted `a kind of antinomianism of the intellect` which made Methodists fear the involvement of religious groups in education, whether in schools or colleges and universities. When the Wesleyan Education Committee was set up in 1836, it marked a turning point in attitudes towards the benefits of formal education, though still with deep suspicions about the involvement of Catholics who might choose to use the government grants to promote what was perceived to be a form of religion inimical to Protestantism. For this reason, Wesleyan Methodists chose to hold back on receiving State aid for their schools for fear of creating a precedence for Catholic grant aid.¹³

To return to the pamphlet, in his preface M`Afee, writing then from Belfast in March 1843 at the very time the Martyrs` Memorial in Oxford was completed, stated that it was these letters and the tracts published by Dr. Pusey, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, which stung him into a robust response. He accused them of being `deluded by Satan .. they pervert the communion table of the Reformers and Martyrs of the British Church into an Italian altar, they have extinguished the light of heaven, and are walking in that of the sickly tapers of Rome`¹⁴. Perhaps he was invoking the spirit of Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer as he took up cudgels of behalf of a now established Protestantism threatened by the rise of Catholicism within and without these islands. Latimer had turned to Ridley as they were tied to the stake and said: "Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out!" The contrast between the flickering lights of Catholic tapers and the strong candle of Protestant truths makes for a powerful polemic

¹² *Vital Piety and Learning : Methodism and Education*. Papers given at the 2002 Conference of the Wesley Historical Society, edited by John Lenton. Applied Theology Press, Oxford, 2005

¹³ *Op.cit*, pp, 1, 4 in Royle`s article on Methodism and Education – a question of denominational image and identity

¹⁴ M`Afee, iii

designed both to justify Protestant positions and undermine their Catholic counterparts.

So M`Afee`s letters to O`Connell seek to defend Methodism against the charges levelled, of intolerance and attacks on religious liberty, and to counter with charges of the anti-scriptural nature of Catholicism in its doctrines and practices. He denounces O`Connell`s invitation to Methodists and others to submit to the Popish Church as an improper attempt to force them to renounce the scriptures and abandon worship of the True God through the only Mediator Jesus Christ in favour of a `Wafer God`, and to `live on Latin Masses`. `To worship a dead saint, a senseless crucifix, a picture on a wall, or a deity whose substance grew in the ground, was ground in a mill, was formed by the hand, and was transubstantiated ... forsooth by the hocus pocus of a priest!`. These three themes of Sacerdotalism, Transubstantiation and affronts to the second commandment in worship and liturgy are a recurring feature of the letters. The attacks on the Roman Church, `a congregation of sinners, dressed in the costume of heathenism, judaism and christianity, a mere patchwork of rites and ceremonies` are associated with the image in the Book of Revelation of the `scarlet-coloured lady` who is bedecked with every earthly trumpery, drunk with the blood of the saints`.

It is for this and other reasons that M`Afee defends the rights of Methodists to oppose the benefits of any system of National Education for the Catholics who are no true Church and a danger to the State. Protestants in Ireland can provide education to the ignorant peasants by distributing bibles and teaching reading. M`Afee pities their ignorance. `We .. abhor your folly and sin, and pray for your deliverance from your religion.` Nor were Methodists guilty of the false charges of being enemies to civil liberty as they had been behind the movement for the emancipation of slaves with their petitions to Parliament.

In answer to O`Connell`s charges that Wesleyan Methodists are `enemies to freedom of conscience , to civil and religious liberty`, he charges Catholics of antinomianism, in their abolition of the second commandment prohibiting image worship, in the `blasphemous, foolish and absurd doctrine of transubstantiation` and in taking away `scriptures from the laity`, leaving Irish Catholics in a `vile den of heresies, - of pollution – and of darkness`. ¹⁵ In contrast to Protestant liberty is the infallibility of Popes and Councils of the Catholic Church to enforce these errors which is `a liberty to disannul the

¹⁵ M`Afee p.26

commandments of God`. `When a man once becomes infallible, he has no need for scripture, history, philosophy, or reason as a guide in church matters`.

¹⁶ Infallibility and Sacerdotalism were the main foci for Protestant attacks even before the First Vatican Council enshrined them in Catholic dogma, however crudely expressed.

`Popery is the poetry of corruption – a mere creation of the imagination – an epic, in which men are exalted into gods – the gods appear in the form of men, and even in wafers; and through ignorance, superstitions, early training, and associations, men cleaving to this imaginary system spurn reality from the mind and embrace fiction ..`¹⁷

Arguments about dogma centered on the nature of sacrifice in the two different traditions. In his final letter, M`Afee sets out a vigorous Protestant riposte. Christ`s sacrifice was himself and the sacrifice of the mass is not the sacrifice of Christ re-presented by priests. The sacrifice of Christ was a living and voluntary one, and a bloody one, making a `complete atonement, propitiation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world`, with scriptural texts to back this up demonstrating that Christ`s sacrifice was offered up once for all upon the cross. M`Afee`s argument conveniently ignores (or was he unaware of it?) the section of Charles Wesley`s *Hymns on the Lord`s Supper* (1745) which included the notion of sacrifice. Elements of the Wesleys` sacramental theology were clearly an embarrassment to their Wesleyan heirs one hundred years later who chose to ignore both the sacramental theology and the call for constant communion by the Wesleys!

M`Afee concludes his pamphlet directly, answering O`Connell`s criticisms of the Manchester Methodists` opposition to proposed changes to the system of National Education in defending the rights of Methodists to full religious liberty which included the right not to be taxed `for the teaching and maintenance of systems of religion which we ... believe to be false and injurious .. to support schools where scriptures were used which are corrupt and unfaithful with notes of the most absurd and pernicious doctrines`. Why should Wesleyan Methodist children be subject to the `dangers of rival sects contending for rival versions of the Bible`?¹⁸

¹⁶ M`Afee, p.47

¹⁷ M`Afee, p.51

¹⁸ M`Afee, p.79

I hope that this offers us a snapshot of Protestant responses to the climate of Irish nationalism and the development of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s in Britain and Ireland which nurtured and shaped the two very different characters whom I now want to look at, namely William Arthur and William Gladstone.

William Arthur and the Risorgimento

For the 150th anniversary of the Risorgimento (2011) I was invited to participate in a historical conference in Rome commemorating the first steps in creating the present day nation state of Italy. It was entitled ***British Methodism and the stirrings of support for democracy and freedom in Italy in the 1840s and 1850s***, setting the social, religious and political context for the establishment of Protestant Missions in Italy, out of an understanding of the prevailing Pan Evangelicalism and Anti-Catholicism that we have sketched so far. It sought to understand the tensions in such support for religious and civil liberties from the ambivalence of Anglicanism and Methodism Wesley and other British Protestants exhibited towards political reforms and nationalist movements. The Irish Question was, of course, as David Hempton has demonstrated, the leitmotif of British politics in the period from 1815 to the First World War.

‘Wherever you go now-a-days, the talk is of Italian politics, civil and ecclesiastical. What of Garibaldi?’

As my earlier detailed study of the British Methodist press and publications before 1861 has demonstrated¹⁹, in the context of political and religious life there was an underlying sympathy for the peaceful process of Italian unification. And the leitmotif for this was the powerful fear of revolution and the resurgence of Catholicism. The presence of Italian exiles and of Cavour and Garibaldi’s and the ex monk from Naples Alexander Gavazzi’s²⁰ visits to Britain helped to raise awareness of the issues and sensitivize British opinion in favour of Italian nationalism. Cavour’s visit in 1834 and his talks with Quakers and other nonconformists about social issues convinced him of the sense of the British model of society, based on security, administrative efficiency and a desire for reform in applying principles of social and religious freedom in evolutionary political democratization. The extension of the Protestant Gospel

¹⁹ Tim Macquiban, Attitudes in the British Press to the Italian Risorgimento up to 1861, in *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, edited Tim Macquiban, Westminster Wesley Series No.2, Summer 1994, Applied Theology Press, Oxford pp.53-65

²⁰ Norman, p.18

would be an antidote to Catholic absolutism and the curtailment of religious and civil liberties. These were major factors in the decision to establish a Methodist presence in the peninsula. It was an emotional response from a growing Protestant northern European power which feared the Ultramontanism of its southern neighbours. The British government supported the revolutions in Central Italy as a check against the French. As Mack Smith reflects, there was “widespread admiration for Garibaldi and for Mazzini’s idea of uniting the whole peninsula.”

Wesleyan Methodist sensitivity was easily aroused as Hempton has shown in his study of *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (1984).²¹ In such circles, John Milton’s poem *On the massacre in Piedmont* was often quoted and learned by children at schools as a reminder of the dangers of tyranny and oppression of Catholicism.

Methodist anti-Catholicism was not only a spur to its social outreach work (such as the Strangers’ Friend societies working in urban centres where there was a significant Irish and Catholic immigrant community) but also to foreign missions. Articles in the *Methodist Magazine* are full of references to missions set up to counter-act the perceived world-wide conspiracy of the Jesuits. Nevertheless, there were other more worthy motives such as a genuine social concern in the process of evangelisation. Richard Watson, the Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary addressing its annual Anniversary meeting in 1833 said:

All our missionary enterprises, all our real attempts to spread Christianity abroad, do tend to increase our sympathies with the external circumstances of the oppressed and miserable of all lands.²²

This view was not however shared by all fellow Wesleyans, many of whose Tory sympathies recoiled from the democratic stirrings of the 1830s and 1840s. Government reaction to the Peterloo (Manchester) disturbances of 1817, the stirrings of Irish nationalism under Daniel O’Connell, and the formation of trade associations leading to the Chartist movement and labour union, was often supported by leading Methodists. Jabez Bunting, at the helm of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion for over 20 years, appealed to the Methodist anti-Catholic sentiment and the fears of democracy by those seeking respectability and stability for their religious status in society. It was he who reputedly said that “Methodism hates democracy as it hates sin.” But he also espoused the concept of religious liberty for all in a letter of 1834:

²¹ Hempton, p.208

²² Quoted Macquiban, p.53

I believe that a great majority of the most thoughtful and influential persons in our Connexion ... are friendly to the principle of an establishment, when connected with that of perfect religious liberty and protection to all denominations.

The period after Catholic Emancipation in 1829 saw the development of a popular Protestant backlash fanned by Irish immigration accelerated in the 1840s by the Potato Famine and by the growth of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England as a result of the so-called Oxford Movement.

Nevertheless, the strong strand of a more Whiggish tradition within Methodism, particularly in its non-Wesleyan branches such as the Primitive and Free Methodist traditions, supporting religious and civil liberties remained. McLeod detects some social radicalism even among some Wesleyan Methodists despite the essential Tory stance of the Connexion as a whole, in line with the predominant social conservatism of mainstream nonconformity in an amalgam of political economy and evangelicalism. Most Methodists were mediators in social conflict, agents of social control, rather than the midwives of revolution on the barricades for freedom and liberty. Professor Spini recognized this feature of British religious life when he applauds “a Protestantism which is liberal, moral, philanthropic, zealous about popular education and keen on wider ecumenical collaboration ... such English Humanitarianism is as a blood brother” in relation to Italian Protestant stirrings.²³

My earlier study of the literature of the 1840s and 1850s has built up a vivid picture of Rome as the enemy of truth and chief obstacle to the evangelization of all peoples. In this climate, the political developments of the Italian peninsula, despite the setbacks of 1848-49 and the disappointment surrounding the supposedly ‘reforming Pope’ Pius IX were watched and reported on with great interest in the religious as well as the political press. When Dr Dixon addressed the WMMS Anniversary meeting in 1849 and referred to the Waldensians, he ventured a rash prediction:

Who knows but that some of you young people may see a ‘Rome’ as a station on our Minutes?

He and others must have seemed surprised at the speed of change in the decade which followed.

The three main features of the response of the British Methodist press to the unfolding events leading up to the creation of the Kingdom of Italy (based on

²³ See the article by Giorgio Spini, Protestant Reaction to Italian Unification, in Macquiban, pp.47 -51

the experience of Italian exiles and those like William Arthur (see below) who visited Italy, demonstrated British support for a Methodist presence in this new theatre of Protestant missions which celebrated 150 years of activity in 2011.

- It built on the Waldensian work which it had protected and nurtured and applauded.
- It fed off the popular anti-Catholicism of British society which warmed to the example of Waldensian witness as the main Protestant survival in a sea of error and superstition.
- It cautiously welcomed the political developments supporting the constitutional developments around monarchy rather than republic in the process of unification.

Methodist Missions

Three particular factors prepared the ground for the decision of British Methodism to join in the process of the evangelization of Italy as part of its expanding mission programme. The first was the judgement that the Pope and Catholic princes of Central and Southern Italy would not give up their oppressive policies. This factor increased fears concerning the resurgence of Catholicism made particularly acute by the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain in 1850-1 and hardening Catholic dogma promulgated by the Pope. Wolffe comments that this became centred on the support for the Italian struggle for liberty against Austrian and Papal oppression." Such Catholicism was perceived to be "hostile to social progress, to personal morality in sexual matters, and to political liberty."

In 1858 articles in the *Methodist Magazine* had a review of the continent of Europe pointing to such dangers, singling out the persecution in Tuscany as but one example of repressive policies. Citing the case of the arrest and imprisonment "of two virtuous individuals condemned to the galleys and hard labour for the crime of loving the Bible", it gave much space to the well-publicized "example of religious persecution which excited such abhorrence at the treatment of Francesco and Rosa Madiari of Florence. Lord John Russell, to become British Prime Minister, led the campaign for their release, defending the right of the British government to interfere "against the use of the civil sword to punish religious opinions". That a British subject, Miss Cunningham, was subsequently arrested for the distribution of tracts added to the war of words in *The Times* and British religious press directed with righteous indignation at Italian Catholic regimes.

Secondly, there was a growing religious backlash which fed this Anglo-Protestant policy of Lord John Russell and others. Protestant societies, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society which produced these bibles for distribution, the Religious Tract Society, the Evangelical Continental Society and many other including the denominational Missionary Societies, all agitated for political pressure in support of religious freedom. The move to help the evangelization of Italy gained ground in the late 1850s as evidenced by a pamphlet written for the *Christian Times*, based on the travels of a supporter of the Foreign Aid Society. It records helping causes in Genoa and Turin, in encouraging prayer and bible reading despite the risk still of arrest and imprisonment in some parts other than Sardinia. The writer observes that while the spirit of religious freedom is sought, there was “little or no faith in political change from politicians or democrats”.

In 1851, M. Revel, the Moderator of the Waldensian Church, Sr. Saffi and Dr Achilli, addressed the conference of the Evangelical Alliance on the religious state and prospects for Italy. Dr Achilli was at the time defending his position in the courts in a vicious libel action concerning his alleged paternity whilst a Roman Catholic priest in Italy before his conversion to Protestantism. This case brought no credit to Catholic leaders who pursued it in June 1852. At the conference, they applauded the tolerance granted in the Piedmont since 1848 with the proclamation of liberty of worship in the Kingdom of Sardinia, seeing it as “the dawning of a better day”, despite continuing difficulties and persecutions at the hands of the catholic majority. “God”, they declared, “crowns with temporal prosperity that only Italian State in which there is any degree of religious liberty”.

Salvatore Ferretti, resident in London and active in mobilizing his compatriots in fighting for Italian liberty, encouraged the British and Foreign Bible Society to support his work in training Italian girls as governesses. In 1860, he reported further on the *Progress of the Gospel in Italy*, citing the example of the Grisons, an evangelical group living not far from Milan, and pointing to the growing work in the cities of Alessandria, Florence, Venice and Naples. “Even in Rome itself”, he concluded, “in the very palace of the Vatican, there are brethren who pray for the evangelization of Italy.” The Pope himself he denounced as “against all the free and enlightened institutions which form the civil prosperity of Europe”. He contributed to the *Eco do Savonarola*, a religious periodical published to remember “the atrocious acts of the Papacy ... and the national glory of the first cry for the Reformation having issued from Italy” (a view that the native lands of Waldo and Wycliffe and Hus might want to take issue with!). Ferretti’s colleagues, Mapei in Liverpool and di Menna in London,

worked among the evangelical communities of those cities to raise awareness and support for Italian Protestantism. Spini concludes that these were examples where “political liberalism and religious nonconformism mixed together feed the warmest feelings towards the Italian cause.” Sadly this was not to prove the case in relationships between Britain and Ireland.

William Arthur (1819 – 1901) ²⁴

This Irish Methodist minister who served British Methodism as Secretary for the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) for nearly 20 years, was foremost in bringing an awareness of the needs of Italy to his church.²⁵ He was a powerful advocate of the Methodist work in both Italy (visiting over several years in the 1850s and 1860s) and India (his only stationing abroad as a missionary in Mysore from 1839-41) in which he was actively involved in initiating and developing. His publication, on his return from the peninsula in 1860, of *Italy in Transition* excited intense interest through the power of the written word (it went into six editions)²⁶ and his addresses at missionary meetings and public lectures. His work is full of vivid examples from personal conversations and encounters, setting the gospel against the claims of the Papacy which he views as “unbiblical, untrue and corrupt”. Dedicated to “one of England’s best sons and one of Italy’s warmest friends, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury”, it gives his support to the new birth of the Italian people as a nation. To the Protestant Alliance and the WMMS he presented the time as one of great opportunity, encouraging support, believing that Italy was ripe for conversion and change. In April 1861, he wrote to *The Watchman* enclosing a copy of a letter from Florence assuring its readers of a change of attitude on the part of the new Italian government to the preaching of Gualtieri and others. Here was one who sympathized with “awakening Italy” in a way which won support for the cause of Methodist involvement in the process of evangelization. It was his backing which gave voice to growing protestant and Methodist support for missions to underpin the political reforms of 1861.

Out of his visits to Italy, he wrote also *Italy in Transition* (1860) based on his conversations with ordinary Italians and picking up on the perceived widespread dislike of Popery. It also built on his innate anti-Catholicism as one from the Northern Ireland context embedded in his article on *Ultramontanism* (1853). a deep-seated fear of the absolutism of power, temporal and spiritual, lying beyond the Alps. As a keen observer of these power struggles for the

²⁴ See article by NWT (below) in a Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland, edited by John A Vickers, Epworth Press, 2000, p,12

²⁵ Norman W Taggart, William Arthur : Christ among Methodists, Epworth , 1993 is the principal biography

²⁶ Taggart, p.21

new Italy he wrote an article for the London Quarterly Review in 1865 ²⁷ as well as *Pope's Encyclical (1865)* and *The Vatican and the Kremlin (1866)* , all providing a basis for supporting aggressive Protestant missions in Italy and elsewhere and those governments lending support for Italy and the fall of Papal temporal power (which was achieved on 20 September 1870).

Arthur's London home (after his appointment as Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1851) also became a focus for leading Irish and English Protestants, of different denominations and parties, for their support for resisting political concessions to the Catholics, such as his activity in opposing Gladstone's proposals to give grants to the Roman Catholic University ²⁸ in Ireland set up under Papal authority in 1854.

Whilst William Arthur was a self-proclaimed ecumenist, being instrumental in setting up the first Methodist Ecumenical Conference meeting in London in 1881, which subsequently met every ten years, a consultative forum for World Methodism, ecumenism for Arthur was the joining together of all Methodists of different strands and beliefs, in partnership with fellow evangelicals, in the hopes of greater unity between themselves in a common purpose, recognizing the value of the Church of England as 'a bulwark against the Roman Catholic Church' and a 'safeguard against Rome .. to stir up the Church of England to good works and directly to counteract the influence of Rome' as he urged the delegates to the 1891 Conference. ²⁹

Arthur was a conversionist mission-orientated revivalist (the author of the acclaimed *Tongue of Fire* which inspired a whole generation of holiness focussed evangelicals in late 19th century Methodism but also stirred up violent sectarianism in Northern Ireland in the 1860s) whose fiercest criticism of Catholicism was not its ritualism but its lack of bible knowledge. In 1872 he observed of the Pope, Pius IX, that he quoted the scriptures in Latin. Of the three languages of Jesus' Cross, the Pope used that of his executioners rather than the Apostles (Greek) or Prophets (Hebrew); could the 'infallible teacher of the Christian faith read his Greek New Testament or Hebrew Bible?' ³⁰

Arthur was also unsurprisingly a Sabbatarian and fierce supporter of strict Puritan-like principles of Christian behaviour for whom Catholic practices rankled. 'The Romish Sunday' offended. 'A Sunday of mingled trade, religious and dissipation, is an engine of social corruption and of national insecurity

²⁷ Taggart, pp.21ff

²⁸ Which became University College Dublin. See Taggart, p.28

²⁹ Taggart, p.44

³⁰ Taggart, p.50

leading to a choice between anarchy and despotism'.³¹ Nudes in paintings and sculptures were further evidence of Catholic depravity! The Maltese and Italians alike were 'very devout and very immoral', like most heathen countries. What mattered were Biblical truths, exemplary holy lives and engagement in Christ's mission.³²

Arthur was also a committed educationalist, setting up the first Methodist theological college in Belfast as Principal. He echoed the concerns of Daniel M'Afee and the Manchester Methodists when he opposed a denominational system of education in Ireland which would be 'worse than enduring the priests'. There should be Free Schools for all, a system of unsectarian schools under elected school boards. Here he found himself in opposition to the views of James Harrison Rigg, a prominent Wesleyan and 'one of the forgotten giants of Methodism' according to David Carter, whose espousal of denominational involvement in public education championed Wesleyan schools and colleges.³³ Education was a battleground for denominational identity and ecclesial superiority in the fierce rivalries of 19th century British society. In this anti-Catholicism drawing from fears of the Catholic presence and perceived threats to liberty in both Italy and Ireland were paramount. William Arthur stoked the fires of fierce sectarianism in defence of his Protestant faith at home and abroad

William Gladstone (1809 – 1898)³⁴ and Vaticanism

Gladstone, from a prominent Liverpool merchant family, joined the Liberal Party and was four times British Prime Minister spread over 12 years (1864-74, 1880-85, 1886, 1892-94) as well as Chancellor of the Exchequer four times (1852-55, 1859-66, 1873-74, 1880-82). He was an MP from the reformed parliament of 1832, supported the emancipation of slaves and accepted the repeal of the Corn Laws in successive reforming governments. His political doctrine embraced equality of opportunity and opposition to trade protectionism making his brand of Gladstonian liberalism uniquely suited to a Britain emerging as the workshop of the world in which the working classes and religious minorities would play an increasingly important role.

³¹ Taggart, p.51-52

³² Taggart, p.65

³³ See Issues in Education : some Methodist perspectives, edited Tim Macquiban. WWS No. 4, Spring 1996, Applied Theology Press, Oxford 1996. David Carter

³⁴ Article in Dictionary of Christian Biography, edited by Michael Walsh, Continuum, London 2001 p.533

In religious matters, his conversion from earlier evangelical Anglicanism to a more liberal but high church stance took place in prolonged stages after leaving the University of Oxford. Several of Gladstone's closest friends were Anglicans who converted to Catholicism which attracted criticism in the University which he represented as MP from 1847. His support for the admission of Jews to parliament was indicative of this liberalism within his establishment position. Early in 1845, when the Cabinet proposed to increase a state grant to the Irish Roman Catholic College at Maynooth, he resigned, not because of opposing the increased grant per se but because it went against something he had written seven years before. He rejoined the government as Secretary of State for the Colonies, considering the claims of English-speaking colonists to govern themselves, a principle later extended in the support he gave to the notion of Irish Home Rule. He supported the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill of 1851 (a reaction against the re-establishment in England and Wales of a Roman Catholic hierarchy) and introduced and passed the Bill for removing theological tests for University degrees (thus allowing both Methodists and other nonconformists but also Catholics to go to Oxbridge colleges) and the Irish Church Disestablishment Bill in 1869. In all these there was an innate tension between his liberal tendencies, his friendship with Catholics and the innate anti-Catholicism which shaped both religious and political beliefs. This was early on set out in his tome on *The State in Relations with the Church* (1838) and in his *Church Principles Considered in their Results* (1840).

As Arnstein points out in his monogram *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid Victorian England*³⁵ Disraeli, the great Tory rival of Gladstone and Prime Minister between his administrations, was also anti-Catholic, having written *Lothair* 'A Romance of No-Popery' in 1870, reflecting a widespread fear of more converts to Catholicism from Anglicanism around this time and with Irish nationalism always in the background. This was also the year of the First Vatican Council with its declaration of Papal Infallibility on which an editorial in *The Times* wrote:

' Nothing but the audacity of blindness can have impelled the Roman Church to proclaim formally this monstrous proposition. '

³⁵ Walter L Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid Victorian England*, University of Missouri Press, 1982

It was Gladstone`s first Liberal government (1868-74) which had begun by supporting Roman Catholics over the Irish Church and peerages for notable supporters (eg. Lord Acton) that, partially influenced by the overtures to Protestant Prussia/Germany, they became emboldened to `express English hostility towards Vatican presumption` and become at one with Queen Victoria`s own evangelical Anglican viewpoint on the subject of Catholicism.³⁶ Perhaps English liberal Protestants were less concerned about doctrines than by Catholic discipline which exhibited the features of sacerdotalism or `priestcraft` that were deemed inimical to individual freedoms and full religious liberty³⁷, a view shared by Arthur and like-minded Methodists. Christian Liberty contrasted with Priestly Supremacy was the theme of the opposition of Lord Odo Russell (nephew of former Prime Minister Lord John Russell) and others of his family, declaring that `the cause of the Pope is the cause of slavery`. ³⁸ Gladstone himself argued that the Vatican Council departed from the earlier Christian tradition and contradicted principles of liberty of conscience and worship, and speech. The demand for universal obedience to the Pope was an affront to human liberty.

Gladstone entered the Vatican Decrees controversy in 1874, laying out the political claims of Rome as a subversion of the Protestant Constitution, with some harsh reflections on the temporal sovereignty of the Papacy in Italy, describing its development from unenlightened bigotry to intolerant autocracy. All this is fed by renewed anti-Irish sentiments fueled by Arthur and others with some vicious preaching from Protestant pulpits, the last expressions of a long tradition of anti-Catholicism going back to the 16th century.³⁹ The declaration of Papal infallibility produced a stiffening of Protestant opinion but all contained within a pamphlet war rather than riots on the streets of cities. It was to men of `enlightened opinion` that the Council`s work seemed most distasteful, reigniting the outrage expressed on publication of the 1864 Syllabus of Errors with its attacks on modernism, learning, science and individual freedoms within a liberal state. Gladstone, now out of office, declared himself against Roman Catholics, contrasting Catholicism and civilization. It all came down to the

³⁶ Arnstein, pp.133 ff

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³⁸ Arnstein, p.188

³⁹ Norman, pp.18-20

vexed question of education. The anxiety of church interference in education made Anglican influence in England and Wales fine but not for Catholics in Ireland. Gladstone shifted from favouring the Catholics in the 1860s to securing nonconformist votes for what became in the last quadrant of the 19th century the emergence of the so-called `Nonconformist Conscience` and the support of Methodists and other dissenters for Gladstonian Liberalism.⁴⁰ Coupled with a renewed attack on aspects of Catholicism distasteful to evangelical Protestants, Gladstone published his article an `Essay on Ritualism` in the *Contemporary Review*, in defence of the Church of England`s spiritual freedom and went on to expand this in a fuller article entitled: *The Vatican Decrees in their bearing on Civil Allegiance : a Political Expostulation*. (November 1874). Based on the Liberal Party`s `unalterable attachment to Italian liberty`, he argued that the Papal definition of Infallibility was `subversive of the civil obedience of Catholic subjects in an enlightened State`. ⁴¹ The *Times* noted his `vehement diatribe against the Pope and Roman Catholicism`, causing him to be described by Pope Pius IX as a `viper` even though reputedly not having read the article! The Methodist press received the book in its reviews enthusiastically. The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* for 1875 in a full article on Mr. Gladstone and the Defenders of Vaticanism gave a full account of Gladstone`s arguments with the Catholic responses summarized, concluding that the arrogant claims of the Papacy had been well refuted by Gladstone staking out the moral high ground in defence of liberty of conscience over and against `sacerdotal supremacy` which sought to subvert the State and its subjects. A.J. the reviewer concludes that such views `will never overcome the hearty Protestantism of this land`. ⁴²

Conclusion : The legacy of Wesleyan and other Methodist attitudes to Catholicism

In the first major work of looking back on the developments within Methodism since its beginnings, the *New History of Methodism (1909)*`s editor concluded that this was “one of the most important movements towards progress in modern Italy. For the presence of well-organized, energetic Protestant

⁴⁰ Norman, p.86

⁴¹ Norman pp.91-94 in a chapter Gladstone and Vaticanism

⁴² *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1875, article on Mr. Gladstone and the Defenders of Vaticanism, pp.164-183

churches is the truest contribution to the revival of liberal ideals and the 'safest' modernism in Italy. They alone can save the social and doctrinal revolution ... from becoming anti-Christian and anti-religious. A warm hearted experimental Christianity ... will be an antidote to atheistic excesses and the salvation from ecclesiastical tyranny and superstition."⁴³ This judgement is a reflection nearly 50 years on from the advent of Methodist missions in Italy in the shadow of the Edinburgh Conference of a sunny optimism of pan-Methodist, pan-Evangelical optimism of reversing the tide of catholicism which threatened to overwhelm Methodism in the British Isles and elsewhere. We today may want to challenge and question that conclusion whilst recognizing the importance of the issues of the relationship of Church and State, of religion and politics that our Wesleyan legacy has left us to ponder over, in the realms of both education and worship.

The latent anti-Catholicism which was the mixed legacy of the Wesleys, whose 'catholic spirit' was weakened by fears of biblical ignorance and priestly prominence countering the educational and missional efforts of Methodist churches, was giving way to a more generous spirit in the coming 'ecumenical century'. The tensions represented by Arthur and Gladstone still reverberate in Ireland and Italy but such crude anti-Catholicism as we have found expressed has given way to an era of formal dialogues and informal close working of Catholics and Methodists even in Italy and Ireland. Even the Doctrine of Justification which so divided the Christian Church at the Reformation has been the subject of a Joint Declaration agreed by five major world communions (Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and Anglican) with some common accord replacing the centuries of disagreement and acrimony.⁴⁴ And over fifty years of Methodist-Catholic dialogue have led to reflections of the progress made since the Second Vatican Council ushered in a new era of ecumenical activity. The *Synthesis: Together in Holiness*, published in 2010, celebrated the achievements of those eight dialogues (now 11) and hoped that they would lead to further reflection on 'the broader relationship ... that the succeeding phases of dialogue might be equally fruitful'.⁴⁵ Cardinal Kasper, one of the main contributors to progress on the Catholic side, wrote that 'the ultimate goal is neither unity on the basis of the lowest common denominator, nor peaceful coexistence, nor uniformity, but visible full communion in faith, sacramental life, apostolic ministry, and mission according to the image of the

⁴³ A New History of Methodism, edited by W J Townsend, H B Workman, George Eayrs, 2 vols, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1909. Methodism in Italy, pp.45-47

⁴⁴ Statement agreed after the Notre Dame conference in the USA in March 2019

⁴⁵ Synthesis - Together in Holiness: 40 years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue. World Methodist Council, 2010

unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the Holy Trinity. ⁴⁶ 140 years on from the Vatican Council of 1870, such aspirations are far in advance of the entrenched Protestant reactions from William Arthur and William Gladstone.

I end with a Charles Wesley verse which was part of my own spiritual journey from Anglicanism to Methodism in another University ('the other place'!) during my undergraduate years when I came to recognize that membership of one particular church did not negate our membership of the 'one holy catholic and apostolic church' or to prevent us from engaging in that ecumenical task in response to our Lord's imperative 'Ut unum sint':

Love, like death, has all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all. ⁴⁷

As Archbishop Rowan Williams, a former participant in this OIMTS observes. 'Christian teaching isn't just static ; it's always trying to learn from its last set of mistakes'. Mistakes over centuries take some time to recognize, acknowledge, repent of and make amends for. I hope this paper is one way of Methodists (and others) recognizing the hurtful things said and the harmful things done to our neighbours in Christ and move on to greater unity.

Tim Macquiban

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⁴⁶ Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, Continuum, 2009, p.205

⁴⁷ Singing the Faith hymnal, no.676

