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Charles de Gaulle famously called the Second Vatican Council the most important event in modern history. Many commentators at the time saw the Council as nothing short of revolutionary, and the later judgements of historians have upheld this view. The astonishing enterprise of a man who became, quite unexpectedly, Pope John XXIII in 1958, this purposeful aggiornamento of the Roman Catholic Church was almost at once a leviathan of papers, committees, commissions, and meetings. Scholars have been left to confront no less than twelve volumes of ‘ante-preparatory’ papers, seven volumes of preparatory papers, and thirty-two volumes of documents generated by the Council itself. A lasting impression of the impressiveness of the affair is often conveyed by photographs of the 2,200-odd bishops of the Church, drawn from around the world, sitting in the basilica of St Peter, a vast, orchestrated theatre of ecclesiastical intent. For this was the council to bring the Church into a new relationship with the modern world, one that was more creative and less defiant; a council to reconsider much – if not quite all – of the theological, liturgical, and ethical infrastructure in which Catholicism lived and breathed and had its being.

Integral to these ecclesiological reconsiderations was the question of how Rome should begin to acknowledge the new realities of the ecumenical age and the possibilities of open, even official, relationships with other churches. A defining dimension of Vatican II was the presence of a number of Observers invited by John XXIII to represent other traditions and to report the workings of the Council to their own leaders. As the Council unfolded, however, it was perceived that those who came simply to ‘observe’ eventually came to exert at least a modest influence, too. Vatican II was not merely a succession of formal sessions which occurred to revise and adopt a series of statements: it

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was an immense conversation, of which the Observers were clearly a significant part.

Between 1961 and 1964 the Archbishop of Canterbury – first Geoffrey Fisher, then Arthur Michael Ramsey – employed a representative in Rome at the Vatican Council. This was Bernard Pawley. During the Council itself Pawley was joined by other Anglican Observers, particularly the Bishop of Ripon, John Moorman. Pawley’s achievement was to open a regular channel of information and opinion which created an important new dimension in the long, and often difficult, history of the relations of the two communions. This soon found a striking place in the new age of ecumenical diplomacy which the twentieth century brought, first to the Protestant world and then, by degrees, to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches too. But Pawley also created a vivid record of the Council at large as he watched and interpreted it from his own particular position. He certainly had his own view and he was unafraid to indulge it. Accordingly, he teaches us almost as much about the attitudes of his own Church as he does about those of Rome in the days of the Council. He also shows the extent to which Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Protestantism at large continued to negotiate with the claims of a disputatious history.

Long after the tumult of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the place of Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom remained a question of public politics across national society. In 1701 the Act of Settlement not only precluded a Catholic from becoming king of England but also effectively ended any hope of a reunion of Rome and Canterbury. Although there were stray encounters, eloquent friendships, and even committed private exchanges (as took place between Archbishop Wake and the French Church in 1718–1719), it was not until the middle of the long nineteenth century that both Rome and Canterbury again gave serious thought to a reunion. A number of pivotal events were to mark the relationship between the two and even point towards the coming of the Second Vatican Council. The English Catholic Church experienced a reawakened self-awareness (which was part of a wider Catholic crusade, fought on a number of fronts), while the Anglican Church was in turmoil, not least because of the intellectual challenges issued by strikingly gifted members who it saw defecting to Rome.

In a century of reform in which the British state sought to consolidate its authority by incorporating those hitherto excluded from government, it was the need to conserve the union of Britain

The most extensive treatment of this remains Norman Sykes, William Wake: Archbishop of Canterbury 1652–1737 (2 vols, Cambridge, 1953); see esp. vol. 1, chapters 1 and 4.
and Ireland that in 1829 brought the Catholic Emancipation Act. At a stroke this repealed laws that imposed civil disabilities on Catholics and allowed them to hold parliamentary office. Twenty-one years later Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) decided to restore the Catholic hierarchy in England as Rome had become increasingly aware that there was an upsurge in Catholicism in the country, much of it the consequence of a swelling migration across the Irish Sea. On the 29 September 1850 Nicholas Wiseman was appointed Archbishop of Westminster and became the first English cardinal since the Reformation. His well-known pastoral letter from October of that year, *Without the Flaminian Gate of Rome,* signalled the beginnings of a halcyon period for English Catholicism. On the one hand Catholic emancipation and the restoration of the hierarchy showed a degree of tolerance of the foreign Catholic faith; on the other hand it unleashed fierce ‘no popery’ agitation and cries of ‘Papal Aggression’. Evidently, the old fear of this foreign religion was still deeply entrenched in parts of the national psyche. When they looked back upon 400 years of Anglo-Catholic relations Bernard and Margaret Pawley saw the restoration to have had fatal consequences for ecumenical relations as it signalled ‘the triumph in the Roman Catholic community for a policy of dependence on Rome’.

As the restoration gathered formidable momentum, the Established Church in England was dealing with problems of its own. The travails of the Oxford Movement represented something more than a crisis of sensitive consciences. Even before they took off for Rome, Tractarians had begun to envision unity with Rome (or in some cases with Eastern Orthodoxy). The converts themselves were far from easy to dismiss; a vigorous assortment, they included the familiar names of John Henry Newman, one day to be a cardinal, and Henry Edward Manning, later Archbishop of Westminster. Other luminaries such as the theologian and mathematician William George Ward and the co-editor of the *Rambler*, Richard Simpson, now contributed immensely to the richness of the English Roman Catholic tapestry. But if conversion for these individuals possessed the quality of resolution, such a leap of faith had not landed them in a situation in which everything was easy or obvious. The breach with Rome had not quite evaporated. Some English-speaking Catholics sometimes found having to follow Vatican


\[2\] Published by *Hooker*, 7 October 1899.

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directives that bore no direct relevance to their own understandings or circumstances perplexing.

Nobody in the nineteenth century would have allowed that politics and religion were in any way separable matters, least of all when it came to Rome. Nor was the place of Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom simply a matter of constitutional amendments or native prejudice. Roman policy did not stay still. The question of loyalty – to the Pope or to the Crown – was now perpetuated by the general victory of Ultramontanism in Rome during the lengthy pontificate of Pius IX (1846–1878). In order to compensate for its weakened diplomatic and political position in relation to national governments throughout the nineteenth century, the Holy See began to play a more direct and aggressive role in the political and intellectual life of the individual national churches than it had done under l’ancien régime. Rome increasingly became a dominant force in the international direction of Catholic theology, led by a revival of Neo-Thomistic philosophy and theology, and intervened in virtually every theological controversy that arose. The devotion to the Holy See and to the figure of the Pope in particular also grew among ordinary Catholics, who for the first time in history could see depictions of their Pope, thanks to modern mass media. Such popular devotion was cleverly utilized by a resurrected scholastic body. This development of curial bureaucracy and the elevation of the teaching authority, the Magisterium, would have consequences for the Second Vatican Council. The increase in papal prestige also caused strong reactions from opponents of papal centralism both within the Church itself and externally, as notable Liberal Catholics and, later, so-called Modernists lamented the lack of such development as seen outside the Church. If anything, a rapprochement with the Anglicans had become more difficult.

On the 8 December 1854 the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was solemnly proclaimed in Rome. Although the observance of the Conception appeared in the Book of Common Prayer for this December day, no provisions were made for its observance. Anglican theologians had long pointed out that the dogma was not contained in scripture, that it was unlikely to be deduced from scripture or defined by an ecumenical council, and that the definition of it as a dogma was unnecessary. But it was the fact that it was the Pope alone who had promulgated the dogma which ruffled Anglican (and some Catholic) feathers. By now, signs of what was to come were clearly discernible. The historian Patrick Allitt has observed, “The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries showed unmistakably

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6 For an extensive recent treatment of this, see Michael Wheeler, The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in nineteenth-century English culture (Cambridge, 2011).
that the Catholic Church had decided to climb out of the river of contemporary intellectual life rather than swim along in midstream, despite the hopes of Newman, Browson, Hecker, and many other converts.¹⁷

Most efforts to ‘modernize’ Catholic thinking were met with the crushing iron fist of papal power. In 1864 Pius IX issued his Quanta Cara, which denounced the separation of church and state, repudiated freedom of religious worship, and decreed freedom of expression and the press as false and pernicious ideas. Attached to it was the Syllabus of Errors, which listed eighty propositions relating to topics including rationalism, socialism, the abrogation of Church privileges, the supremacy of civil authority over legislation, and the liberties and rights associated with liberalism, as these were considered part of a broad secular attack against the Church. The Syllabus condemned many of the principles which contemporary social scientists and biblical critics outside the Catholic Church were by now freely applying in their studies. It concluded by condemning the proposition that ‘the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization’.²⁸

The Syllabus was a heavy blow to both Newman and the Catholic layman John Acton. Although the latter remained within the Catholic fold he increasingly came to see the ‘Roman world’ through the eyes of the Anglican politician William Gladstone, who published furiously on Roman matters, trying to reconcile what he found to be the best of both the Catholic and the Anglican worlds. But all three of them must have known that they were now swimming against a very stiff tide indeed. In 1870, Ultramontanism reached its zenith with the promulgation of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. Despite the insistence of such towering figures as Newman and the German church historian Ignaz von Döllinger that the historical evidence supporting the promulgation was insufficient, a majority of the bishops present voted for elevating the Pope’s authority. Manning, too, supported papal infallibility: Ultramontanism actually equalled liberty and religious freedom from the civil state. One of the main reasons for his conversion in 1851 had been the Corham case, in which the judgement of the state had overruled the verdict of an Anglican bishop.

The First Vatican Council crushed any ecumenical hopes that might once have been harboured. Already in 1857 a small group

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of Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox, under the leadership of the prominent convert Ambrose de Lisle, had founded the Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom with Cardinal Wiseman’s blessing. The purpose of the Association was to pray and work for the reunion of churches and church bodies in the East as well as in the West. When Manning succeeded Wiseman, the Association found itself condemned by the Holy Office in 1864 and the Catholic participants were forced to withdraw. Without the oxygen of official patronage, other schemes working for partial union, such as the Order of Corporate Re-union, eventually floundered.

Anglicans interpreted all of this with severity. To Mandell Creighton, Bishop of London between 1897 and 1901, the Roman Church was built on an autocratic power of clergy while the English Church was founded upon learning and liberty. He wrote,

The function of the Church of England is to be the Church of free men. […] Its enemy is the Church of Rome, but it ought not to treat its foe with fear, but with kindly regard. The Church of Rome is the Church of decadent peoples: it lives only on its past, and has no future.  

A kindly regard for decadence seldom serves as a very robust basis for a rapprochement.

Though the conversions from the Church of England to Rome were luminous, many who were touched by the Oxford Movement stayed within the Anglican Church. To this they brought a rich vision of the universal Church, a vivid argument of history, a lively neo-Gothic imagination, and a certain amount of local trouble. Ritualism was a problem for those who sought order in the Church of England, at least in part because its rise was a part of that flourishing of Victorian religion which simultaneously saw the emergence of a more vigorously Protestant evangelicalism. Both had their patrons, apologists, activists and campaigners, pamphlets, sermons, and hymns. There was even a broad symmetry in their patterns: the Anglo-Catholic Lord Halifax was nicely matched by the ultra-Protestant Sir William Harcourt. Naturally, neither of these movements had any love for the other. Often they were virtually at war.

A certain amount of this could be tolerated, even smiled upon, without undue fuss. Creighton himself sought to take a large view and to frame a broad policy, though he maintained a firm conviction that Protestantism offered a necessary simplicity in religion. ‘The more I see the working of the Church of Rome’, he remarked, ‘the less I believe in its elaborate machinery. The Anglican plan of laying down a minimum, and leaving room for more as each individual thinks

fit, is certainly more invigorating.” He did not much like incense in church but he would eventually shrug it off: ‘If they want to make a smell’, he remarked blithely, ‘let them.” He thought an Italian could carry it off well enough, but not an authentic Englishman. However, even Creighton bristled and fumed at the increasing adoption of the word ‘Mass’. He did not want altars washed, crosses adored, or the benediction of paschal candles. Congregations holding palms could properly be blessed, but not the palms themselves. Holy water was, he maintained, something the English Church knew nothing about.

When some London clergy began to require personal confession from their parishioners before Communion he drew a line: this intruded on the proper realm of Christian liberty. Then there were new services – benediction, the Rosary of the Virgin, services for the dead – which revolted openly against all the principles of the Church of England. This, in short, was a matter of doctrine – and doctrine was what bishops were meant to defend, not tamely with words but with actual discipline. That Creighton never prosecuted anyone under the Clergy Discipline Measure of 1840 was hardly noticed by Ritualists but deplored by Evangelicals. Little wonder that he should come close to despair; little wonder that his friends saw his life shortened by it all.

For all its querulousness, Anglo-Catholicism created a new basis within the Church of England for Anglican–Roman understanding. Furthermore, by the end of the nineteenth century a new encyclical by Leo XIII, Ad Anglos, seemed to strike a more generous note in Rome. Should an attempt be made to cultivate this? Perhaps it was a territory best navigated not by a senior cleric under authority but a layman free to work under his own steam? Charles Wood, second Viscount Halifax, was rooted firmly in Ritualism. It was at the invitation of Edward Bouverie Pusey, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, that he had become President of the English Church Union (the Anglo-Catholic lobby), a position which he retained for much of the rest of his life. At least a part of the significance of his new ‘Italian Mission’ lay in that it showed how direct communication with Rome might circumvent the English Catholics entirely and instead trace an elegant line to Rome through France, for that was where Halifax found his greatest collaborator and ally, in the Abbé Ferdinand Portal.

Halifax had his admirers but he often looked as though he was merely a quixotic enthusiast who could always be devastated by the faint praise that he was, of course, well-meaning. But the little canoe that he so often paddled alone was robust, and Halifax evidently

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“ibid., p. 94.

1 ibid., p. 91.
knew the value of persevering. Bishop Creighton was one of those who watched him, not unsympathetically but from a distance. ‘You may go on well enough for a distance’, he mused, ‘and then comes the blank wall of the papal monarchy.’ Anglican Orders were entirely valid. It was not because of a sixteenth-century secession but because the Roman Church had denied them that a breach between them had arisen. Creighton added to this: ‘The restoration of the unity of Christendom will be — not by affirming any one of the existing systems as universal, but by a federation.’

For a time Anglo-Catholics were hopeful, but in 1896 Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) made a categorical declaration in the papal bull Apostolicae Curae that Anglican orders were ‘absolutely null and utterly void’. When this appeared, Creighton pressed that there must be a reply. He, with Bishops Stubbs of Oxford and Wordsworth of Salisbury, was put to work by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson, and a predictable defence was mounted. It all came to very little. A modest number of Anglican clergymen who saw themselves as members of the worldwide Catholic communion felt that they had no choice but to resign from their livings and convert to Catholicism. Others merely took a dismal view of the whole business and continued to shelter behind the usual barricades. A leading article in The Times announced the publication of the Bull as follows:

The long and exhaustive study under the Pope’s direction declaring the orders conferred by the English Church absolutely invalid, will be a shock to well-meaning members of the Anglican communion and puts an end to all hope that the Pope will smooth the road for reunion of the two churches by at least recognising that the Anglican Church exists as a Church.

Creighton had hit a nerve when he wrote of Rome as an oppression to those who cherished liberty. Under Pius X (1903–1914) the Biblical Commission sternly set its face against the discoveries of the historians and exegetes to whom Protestantism turned for new understanding and wisdom. Stray clusters of Catholic Modernists who sought to stir a new openness to critical theological thought at the onset of the twentieth century were cruelly suppressed by papal policy. The reign of Benedict XV saw something of a thaw, and it was indeed in these years that a British Legation to the Vatican was established, in 1915. But the thaw was a very slow one and many sensed no change at all.

It was increasingly the case that Anglican–Roman Catholic discussions would find a new place within the ecumenical movements.

19Failows, Mandell Creighton, p. 47.
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of the twentieth century. Ecumenism was, by and large, a Protestant enthusiasm but it enjoyed a widening dispensation across all the churches, sometimes in the realms of authority but more often still in the lives of the laity. Under Randall Davidson (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1903–1928) a quiet but increasingly purposeful view of ecumenical possibilities began to emerge across the Church of England. Davidson saw no embarrassment in worshipping with Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, or Presbyterians. For him all of this lay happily under the umbrella of the natural calling of the national Church. He also became cautiously alive to the emerging importance of ecumenical endeavours internationally, while many of his bishops were soon vigorous participants in these enterprises.

The most striking innovation came at the 1920 Lambeth Conference, when a bold ‘Appeal to all Christian people’ was issued. With this the Anglican Church at large nailed its colours to the mast of union, albeit according to the terms of what had become known as the Lambeth–Chicago Quadrilateral. Those who led the Free Churches in Britain recognized this to be a defining moment and set about their replies. An unsmiling Roman Catholic hierarchy steadfastly looked the other way.

If anything, English Roman Catholicism looked more intently towards a solid self-establishment on its own high ground than anything involving any other church. The new century had brought a new Archbishop of Westminster: in 1903 the Bishop of Southwark, Francis Bourne, succeeded Herbert Vaughan. Bourne had no intention of maintaining a ghetto; he was resolved to present the Catholic faith openly in public. He defied the law on Eucharistic processions by giving the benediction from the loggia of Westminster Cathedral in 1908. By 1911 he wore a cardinal’s hat. In issues of national politics Bourne was quietly accommodating. However, beyond occasional frigid civilities, in the relations of churches he was resolutely uninterested. Those who longed for some development in Anglican–Roman understanding looked long and hard, and found none.

The 1920 Lambeth Conference Appeal did provoke a gracious telegram from the Primate of Belgium, in May 1921. This was the Archbishop of Mechelen (Malines in French), Cardinal Mercier. Mercier had charm but he was no mere manager of Church affairs; possessed of a rich and generous mind, a Thomist and an intellectual, he knew too much of the world to lock himself away in an ecclesiastical

19In short, the Holy Scriptures, the Creeds, the two sacraments, and the historic episcopate.

20Fallows, Mandell Creighton, p. 47.
fourth dimension. He had lost much of his cathedral and thirteen priests during the German occupation in the war; after a vigorous pastoral letter in January 1915 he had been duly subjected to house arrest. Mercier was a man on the side of the angels. When the Catholic Modernist George Tyrrell was hounded by the Catholic Church in England, Mercier offered him a job in Belgium. In 1919 the archbishop had visited the United States and proven a palpable hit. To the Episcopal Church he affirmed ‘we are brethren in the Christian faith’, and was cheered to the rafters.\textsuperscript{17} On the other hand, Mercier was sufficiently connected to Rome to know how to cultivate Pope Benedict XV and he evidently enjoyed the approval of the Papal Secretary of State, Pietro Gasparri. He was, in short, someone with whom venturesome English Anglicans might hope to do business.

The old roots set down in 1896 now yielded some new fruits. The friendship of Portal and Halifax was not yet played out. Lord Halifax travelled to Malines for the first time in 1921. Mercier was ready for more of this: friends of Halifax were cordially welcome. In December of the same year, three Catholics met three Anglicans there. None of this had concerned Archbishop Davidson.\textsuperscript{18} But the glimmering of momentum in these conversations, and the hope that something of real value might be wrung out of them, began to call upon the sanction of higher authorities. With this came a growing seriousness and a deepening caution. Davidson was careful not to jump: he would acknowledge but not participate – and this, too, only if Rome did the same. On his side Mercier applied for due recognition and got what he wanted. In Westminster even Cardinal Bourne now seemed to Halifax ‘very friendly and generally sympathetic’.\textsuperscript{19}

The unfolding history of the three Malines Conversations was not without mishaps and melodrama.\textsuperscript{20} The conferences grew weightier in turn but, however hard they worked, they could not find a way round papal jurisdiction. Though plenty were sketched, no literary formula would do. By now the Bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, was a part of the enterprise. In Halifax’s opinion, Gore was only a nuisance. Gore thought much the same of Halifax. Others thought that Gore, unlike Halifax, knew how to draw a firm line of principle – and when

\textsuperscript{18}For a detailed treatment see G.K.A. Bell, Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury (3rd edition, Oxford, 1952), pp. 1254–1302. It is the kind of extensive, intricate treatment that no academic publisher would now allow – and yet indispensable to scholars for all these reasons.
\textsuperscript{20}See Bernard Barlow, ‘A brother knocking at the door’: the Malines Conversations 1921–1925 (Norwich, 1996).