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978-0-521-25960-6 - Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England: Volume III: Accommodations

Maurice Cowling

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Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England
Volume III: Accommodations

The first two volumes of this magisterial sequence discussed a conflict between bodies of thought operative in England in the last century and a half – the aggressive defence of Christianity which has been made from Newman onwards, and the aggressive assault on Christianity which has been made from Spencer onwards. The third and concluding volume of *Religion and Public Doctrine* examines three related strands of thought – the latitudinarianism which has assumed that Christianity should be accommodated to modern thought and knowledge, the Christian thought which has assumed that latitudinarianism gives away too much and the post-Christian thought which has assumed that Christianity is irrelevant or anachronistic.

As in previous volumes, Maurice Cowling conducts his argument through a series of close encounters with individual thinkers, including Burke, Disraeli, the Arnolds, Tennyson and Tawney among many others in the first half, and Darwin, Keynes, Orwell, Leavis and Berlin among many others in the second. Central to the whole is Mr Cowling's contention that the modern mind cannot escape from religion, and that there is a defiant continuity between Christianity, post-Christianity and those anti-Christian religions which deny continuity within Christianity.

Religion and Public Doctrine is an ironic, polemical and (from certain perspectives) venomous work, in the echoes it brings from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and Macaulay's *History of England*. It is not intended to be a definitive history of English thought from Edmund Burke to Terry Eagleton, although its three volumes provide the most extensive analysis yet undertaken of the trajectories English thought has taken in confronting its central questions of cultural meaning, value and import in a Christian, anti-Christian and post-Christian society. Mr Cowling makes no closing prediction, and recognizes that the Christian phase of European civilization may be over. Nonetheless he concludes that the religious instinct which lurks beneath the indifference of the English public mind may yet surprise by its willingness to yield again to Christianity.

Religion and Public Doctrine represents a massive contribution to the intellectual, cultural and political history of modern England. It will interest historians, literary and cultural critics on both sides of the Atlantic, theologians, philosophers, economists, as well as that broader reading public with a serious interest in the making of the English mental landscape.

MAURICE COWLING was born in London in 1926. He was educated at Battersea Grammar School and Jesus College, Cambridge, where he read history. He did military service between 1944 and 1948 in the British and Indian armies. He was a Fellow of Jesus College from 1950 to 1953 and, after a period spent chiefly in London, returned to Jesus as a Fellow in 1961. From 1963 to 1993 he was a teaching Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and for part of that time was University Reader in Modern English History. He has written books entitled *The Nature and Limits of Political Science*; *Mill and Liberalism*; *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*; *The Impact of Labour*; *The Impact of Hitler* and *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (Volumes I and II), all of which have been published by Cambridge University Press.

Mr Cowling was a Conservative parliamentary candidate at the general election of 1959, a member of the Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely County Council from 1966 to 1970, and Literary Editor of *The Spectator* in 1970 and 1971. In 1978 he edited *Conservative Essays*. On his retirement from Cambridge in 1993, Mr Cowling taught for a time in the United States. He now lives partly in a flat in London and partly in his wife's flat in the Gower Peninsula.

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in Modern England*

Volume III: Accommodations

Maurice Cowling

Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge



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Foreword and acknowledgements

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It was originally intended to end this volume with a bibliographical essay which would have surveyed the literature of the subject. To add to a work which is already long seemed in the end undesirable so, instead of such an essay, the author records his debt to the innumerable thinkers who, in offering their understandings of English thought in the last couple of centuries, have not only been contributing to it but have also given it a character which it would not have had without them. Finally, the author cannot state too strongly that, though Christianity has become a political religion, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* is not primarily a political work and is to be distinguished very sharply both from the author's three works of political history¹ and from the polemical Conservatism to which he gave expression in *Conservative Essays* in 1978, in casual journalism before and after 1978 and in the long preface to the paperback edition of *Mill and Liberalism* in 1990.

The main text of the paperback edition of *Mill and Liberalism* was more or less a reprint of the main text of the first edition (1963). It was there that the author first approached the problems with which all three volumes of *Religion and Public Doctrine* deal: to show that secularization, and de-Christianization, are intellectual and religious rather than mechanical, inevitable or sociological processes; to describe the lines of argument by which they have established their hold on the English public mind; and to establish that they have often arrived so innocently and surreptitiously that their coming has passed unnoticed.

The author sees the point of an Erastian establishment as a way of diffusing a Christian mentality into the nation's life, of an independent, world-wide church like the Roman Catholic Church in embodying Christianity's autonomy in relation to secular powers, and of dissent insofar as dissent registers the resolve to do nothing, in liturgy, ritual and church-government which is not, according to precisionist principles, exactly what should be done.

Though the English monarchy in a sense has, the Conservative Party no longer has, as one of its main purposes, the preservation of the Anglican Establishment, and it must be an open question whether Christianity's pre-eminence can survive in an Anglican form; whether in order to survive in a

¹ 1867: *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution* (1967), *The Impact of Labour 1920–1924* (1971), and *The Impact of Hitler 1933–1940* (1975).

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secularized society, Christianity does not need an independent ecclesiastical power; and whether, after the doubt and turmoil they underwent in the 1960s and 1970s, the Anglican, the Roman Catholic or the dissenting clergy in England have the requisite normality, serenity and self-confidence to address the Christianity which is latent in English life.

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Introduction

Earlier volumes of this work¹ discussed a conflict between two bodies of thought operative in England in the last century and a half – the aggressive defence of Christianity which has been made from Newman onwards and the aggressive assaults on Christianity which has been made from Spencer onwards.

Volume I took the form of an intellectual autobiography in which the thinkers who influenced the author most between the 1940s and the 1960s were discussed as exponents of literature, morality, politics and religion. Volume II was historical, not autobiographical; it organized the thinkers it discussed not only as contributors to the resistance offered by Tractarianism and Roman Catholicism to liberalism, latitudinarianism and infidelity, but also as contributors to the dethroning of Christianity and its replacement by explicit types of anti-Christian doctrine.

Volume II described a polarized conflict in which hostages were not taken and there was little attempt at mutual understanding. It contrasted the secular attack on Christianity with the Christian counter-attack, made an historic crux of the contrast, and grouped the thinkers that it discussed around it. Thus Spencer, Lewes, Tyndall, Wells, Shaw, Murray, Morley, Frazer and D. H. Lawrence were leading representatives of the first; Newman, Gladstone, Keble, Liddon, Mansel, Manning, Pusey, Chesterton, Belloc, Mallock and Graham Greene were leading representatives of the second and would have been strengthened by Eliot, Salisbury, Waugh and Knowles if these had not already been discussed in Volume I.

Volume I had included thinkers who did not fit into either of these categories. Norman had a Tractarian nose for backsliding but was neither a Roman Catholic nor a High-Churchman. Kedourie was an anti-liberal Jew and Butterfield a Dissenter who became a virtual Anglican. Whitehead and Churchill teetered on the brink of secular liberalism; Toynbee and Collingwood were well over the brink; and Oakeshott, though disrespectful of religion, wrote in the main as a secular conservative. To anyone who

¹ *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England I*, 1980 and *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England II*, 1985.

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thought seriously about the connection between Volume I and Volume II, it was obvious that the structure of Volume II was too simple.

In this volume we shall examine three bodies of thought – the latitudinarianism which has assumed that Christianity should be accommodated to modern thought and knowledge, the Christian thought which has assumed that latitudinarianism gives away too much and the post-Christian thought which has assumed that Christianity is irrelevant or anachronistic.

These classifications relate to the question, central to all three volumes, whether the modern mind can escape from religion. The argument is that it cannot escape, that Christianity's retreat has not entailed the retreat of religion and that religion will still be found in the crevices of thought wherever investigation looks for it. Whatever post-Christian and anti-Christian thinkers may have thought they were doing, they were in fact contributing to a transformation within religion. Those thinkers who believed that religion could be eliminated were victims of an especially modern type of false consciousness, the existence of which can best be established by a certain procrusteanism of organization and the high duty the historian is under to compel the historical material to tell him what he wants to be told.

What the author wants to be told was disclosed to some degree in Volume I and will be disclosed more fully in the Conclusion to this volume. What is disclosed in the main parts of this volume is the tension between the 'normal' and the 'latitudinarian', a rancour about the future direction of Christian thinking, and the weakening of intellectual and institutional Christianity as a consequence.

Among 'normal' attitudes, the content has varied from generation to generation. But 'normal' attitudes persist and assume a continuity which is impervious to fashion and avoids latitudinarian erosion and exaggeration. Continuity and imperviousness have taken many forms – the form of Whewell, Shaftesbury and Stubbs, for example, among thinkers who are discussed at length, the forms, among thinkers who are not discussed at length, of Headlam's *Christian Theology*, Hailsham's *Door Wherein I Went*, A. E. Taylor's *Vindication of Religion*, Hensley Henson when not writing theologically, the younger Chadwick as both critic and Church-historian, and the first Earl of Selborne in *Letters To His Son on Religion*.

By latitudinarianism is meant the conviction that, without a reduction or rearrangement, Christianity will not deserve to survive. This has been designed to bring Christianity into line with progress in science and history or with fashion in literature, to disassociate it from extremes, *ancien régimes* and counter-revolutions, and to ensure that, by avoiding confrontation with modern knowledge and being amalgamated *with* modern liberation, morality or the historical and scientific spirit, it will become as natural a part of modern life and knowledge as it can be without ceasing to be Christian.

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Latitudinarianizing in this sense is what Carlyle and Coleridge were doing to Christianity and Disraeli to both Christianity and Judaism. It is what F. D. Maurice did in spite of an ostensible resistance to doing it, what Caird, Green and Wallace did in spite of doubts about what they were doing, and what Seeley did in turning the anti-ecclesiastical Christian toughness of *Ecce Homo* into *Natural Religion* and *The Expansion of England*. It is what Bunsen, the great savant, and Thomas Arnold's comforter, brought with him as Prussian Minister to London in the 1840s, what Max Müller, Bunsen's protégé, brought with him to Oxford in the 1850s, what Lecky brought with him from Ireland in the 1860s, and what the eighth Duke of Argyll, one of Thomas Arnold's most prolific admirers, and A. M. Fairbairn, one of Max Müller's most prolific admirers, brought with them from Scotland between 1860 and 1900. Most important of all, it is what Jowett and Dean Stanley stood for, and what Thomas Arnold had stood for, tendentiously and offensively, in the 1830s when, in addition to inventing the Arnoldian public school, he defined the principles of Biblical criticism, looked forward to Catholic emancipation protestantizing Catholic Ireland, and argued that the Church of England would be well able to resume its historic place as the national Church if only it would criticize capitalism and alter its creeds, prayers and view of ordination so as to reflect the fact that 'all moderate and reasonable men' were agreed in 'essentials'.

The rearrangement of a religion is a formidable undertaking and some approaches to rearrangement were unconscious or indirect. Wordsworth approached it through *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* and Tennyson through *In Memoriam*. Lecky approached it through the replacement of ascetic and monastic Catholicism by the 'industrial' spirit after the seventeenth century, Seeley through the belief that science, culture and liberalism since 1789 had been doing the same good as Christianity, and Bunsen through the history of Egypt, Egypt's affiliations with central Asia, and central Asia as the 'starting-point of all religion'. Max Müller approached it through India and Sanskrit, through the language of the Aryans and the 'purity of the Vedas', and through the need to Aryanize Semitic Christianity. Carlyle's approach was through the modern ruler and the modern man-of-letters, Macaulay's through the judgement that the English Reformation had been effected by 'men who cared little about religion', and the Oxford Idealists through a shift from the sensationalism of Locke and Hume to the Idealism of Kant and Hegel.

The idioms in which these intuitions have been expressed have been as varied as the ways of expressing them. In Froude 'the speculations of so-called divines were ropes of sea-slime leading to the moon' and the Church of England was to be supported because only an *established* Church could do away with dogma. Kingsley treated dogma as concealing through 'pride and conceit' what Bacon's God had revealed to the 'gentle and simple-hearted', and in *Westward Ho!*, had a tragic hero who 'understood nothing more of

theology . . . than was contained in the Church Catechism'. Green's God was 'the one spiritual self-conscious Being' to which men were related as 'partakers' and the clouds of darkness by which He was occluded included the failure of the educated classes to bring spiritual and economic freedom to the vast numbers of new souls who had been created by the Industrial Revolution. Stanley likewise, in addressing the modern world, connected Abraham's religion with Christianity's primordial freedom from dogma and superstition and called up a vast cloud of latitudinarian witnesses which included Jowett, Kingsley, Bunsen, Seeley, Max Müller, Acton, Bacon, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Christ, and Thomas and Matthew Arnold.

Latitudinarianism is sometimes thought of as a nineteenth-century phenomenon which passed away once modern knowledge had been accepted as a Christian accomplishment. This is misleading. Eddington, a Quaker, Whitehead, an Anglican (in America an Episcopalian) and Toynbee, though he flirted with Roman Catholicism, were certainly latitudinarian. So were Inge, and Collingwood and, from some points of view, Balfour and Temple. Zaehner in certain respects was a hard-line Roman Catholic but could be as eclectic and ecumenical as Pope John XXIII. C. S. Lewis had a Protestant sense of moral danger while transposing his Protestantism into fiction, literary criticism and a sort of natural theology. And there have been innumerable others – not only Eagleton, the Marxist literary critic, who in his twenties wrote five works of liberationist Catholicism in which Roman Catholics were to help 'Marxist, third-world, black-power and hippie intensity' convert 'monopoly capitalism' into a 'just community', but also Needham who spent forty-five years transposing his fluent and prolific mixture of Marxism, Anglo-Catholicism and bio-chemical evolutionism on to the history of Chinese science, contrasting Taoism's receptivity to science with theological Christianity's resistance to it, and demanding of Christians a willingness to 'sit down in the lowest room' and listen to Mao-Tse-Tung on the ground that he was a 'social and ethical philosopher rather than a military man'. Nor have Barthianism, Kierkegaardianism or deconstruction killed the latitudinarian mentality which lived on in the Barthian, Wittgensteinian, Christian Marxism of the young MacIntyre, whose Marxism criticized orthodox Christianity from a more Christian standpoint than he believed orthodox Christianity was capable of achieving by itself; and in Zaehner's Roman Catholicism, which subverted orthodoxy and theology by marrying Christ, Marx and Teilhard de Chardin and listening to as well as correcting the so-called youth mysticism and drug-culture of the late 1960s.

Some of the thinkers discussed in the first half of this volume were reacting against latitudinarianism while being in limited respects, like Acton or Forsyth, latitudinarian themselves. Early Pater was disrespectful about historic Christianity and Wilde dismissive of Christian respectability. Stirling translated Christian theology into the Hegelian language which some of

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Christianity's enemies had used in order to subvert it. Even Stubbs, a conservative enemy of latitudinarianism, made his own.

A latitudinarian reconstruction was necessary according to its proponents because Christianity could only be made compatible with science and culture by adopting a manner to which these could respond. At its best, this reaction was subtle and suggestive. At its worst, it became a routine reaction.

Latitudinarianism has been contested by the Tractarian and Roman Catholic thinkers who were described in Volume II, by 'normal' Anglicans who combined aversion to Rome with Newman's aversion to liberalism and infidelity and by 'normal' Nonconformists who claimed to embody the only answer to Rome and infidelity, and the only real defence of Christianity. During the last century and a half, 'normal' Christianity has incorporated many elements of latitudinarian reconstruction but has been differentiated from latitudinarianism by Nonconformity's inherited suspicion of any attempt to accommodate Christ's message to the world, by the Anglican conviction that the Church of England needed to draw lines and display a renewed conviction of incontestability, and by the belief, expressed tactically by Bishop Gore and others, that rational assent to Christianity depends on antecedent probability.

The second half of the volume – 'The post-Christian consensus' – gives critical attention to Darwin, F. H. Bradley, Ramsay Macdonald, Beatrice Webb and Anthony Kenny who did not really get away from Christianity; to Galton, Bosanquet, A. C. Bradley, Sidney Webb, R. B. Haldane, Maitland, L. T. Hobhouse, Keynes, Crossman and Orwell who did (more or less); to Roger Scruton whose rehabilitation of 'religion' has led him to replace Christianity by high culture; and to Pearson's marriage of science, Marxism and free-thinking, Parry's marriage of free-thinking, music and spirituality, Julian Huxley's 'religion without revelation', and Richards's, Leavis's, Williams's, Popper's and Dawkins's moral, literary and scientific secularities.

Apart from Scruton, these have been deliberately 'modern thinkers' who may, like Haeckel, have regretted 'the death of the gods' that were 'so much' to their 'parents and ancestors' but have treated Christianity as an optional extra which makes no difference to thought. In the concluding chapter (as in discussing Laski in chapter 20), similar modernities will be examined in Jewish thought, including Koestler's Zionist and post-Zionist secularity and the Heideggerian Arnoldianism through which Steiner's abandonment of Judaism as a religion and retention of Judaism as grievance have carried forward into the new millennium, with all the unbearable of a barbarous idiom, a post-Judaic version of that identification of culture with religion which Arnold had begun to develop in the 1860s.

In the second half of the volume the dominant idea is not science but modern knowledge since the idea of a post-Christian, or post-Judaic, consensus has been as prominent in history, psychology, philosophy, criticism and literature as in the natural sciences, and the line of thinkers which has led up

to Leavis or Eagleton has been as important as the line of thinkers which has led down from Darwin to Dawkins.

In England in the last century and a half, three types of modern knowledge may be distinguished. There has been knowledge acquired by scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, historians and critics within the framework of whatever assumptions they have made at any particular time about the proper objects of their attention. There has been thinking which has modified these assumptions or brought into play assumptions which have integrated all types of argument or investigation into the total conspectus of knowledge and action. And there has been thinking which has used the idea of science, mathematics, philosophy, history or criticism as a basis for public doctrine.

These types of thinking (and writing) have overlapped. But there can be no doubting the separateness of the third type, the talent and versatility with which it has been pursued, or the exigence of the claim it has made on behalf of the centrality of modern knowledge to public thought.

In examining the post-Christian consensus, the argument will be that the intensity of assumption which in England went previously into Christian thought now goes into post-Christian thought, and that the normal assumption in very modern England (certainly since the late 1960s) is that public statement should be silently secular, whether the secularism is academic, aesthetic, scientific, political or religious. Not all the thinkers who make this assumption recognize that they are making it. That they are making it is an important feature of very modern English thought, an important source of both intellectual insensitivity and intellectual achievement, and a demonstration of the fact that it is difficult for a thinking person to avoid religion.

By religion is meant the attribution of sanctity to existence and a duty to maximize sanctity into practice, whether the practice is personal, liturgical or political. Religion ratifies or condemns practice by reference to the nature of existence, and it does this whether duty is conceived of as subject to divine, human or natural control, and whether or not individuals believe themselves to have been liberated from religion. Christian characteristics vary and the name Christian should not in analysis be denied too readily to those who claim it. But the important question is not about Christianity but about whether any ratification of belief and practice can avoid being religious, and whether thinkers who disclaim a religious character are not so obviously filling the space filled previously by historic religion that mere disclaimer cannot effect a disengagement.

This is a major question. It demands critical consideration of the content of modern English thought, Christianity's failure to remain central to it, and the myriads of uncapturable personal dramas which have turned England into the modern, para-Christian society that she is. The tension between average opinion and the intellectual John-the-Baptists who have run ahead of average opinion on both sides in Volume II and in both parts of the present

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volume is operative throughout. The ‘public moralists’ who have written in the wake of Carlyle, Newman, Ruskin, Gladstone, Disraeli and Salisbury, so far from thinking and acting like ‘conventionally-educated, comfortably-situated male readers sitting in their clubs at the social and political heart of the most important city in the world’, have been shown to be sensitive and inventive intelligences whose religion has been pivotal to the duty to mediate between the thinking classes and the new democratic public, and to ease the way of the most powerful nation on earth past the disintegration threatened by class-conflict, world-conflict and the dissolution of historic Christianity.

Two questions arise. First, whether post-Christian religions can be said to have rituals and liturgies in the way in which Christianity has them; to which the answer is that they can, that it is only the passage of the centuries which has disconnected Christian liturgy and ritual from normal life and knowledge, and that one of the acid tests of a really modern Christian sensibility is that it accepts the disconnection and denies the duty to be rid of it. Second, whether men do not necessarily live divided lives, with science, say, being governed by one language and set of assumptions and religion, say, by another language and set of assumptions; to which it must be replied that they do but that the umbilical cord between Christian and post- and anti-Christian perceptions is religious, whatever the ‘non-religious’ may claim to the contrary.

The belief that the umbilical cord can be broken will not survive the critical exposition of individual thinkers who, whether they have addressed England from Chartwell or The Oratory at Egbaston, from St Paul’s Cathedral or the Metropolitan Tabernacle, from the Royal Albert Hall, the London School of Economics or the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge; or from Hawarden, Rydal, Hatfield, Eversley, Highbury, Balliol College, Oxford, Hackney Congregationalist College, Fleet Street, Broadcasting House, the Television Centre at Wood Green or the Royal College of Music, have done so in the shadow of an historic interdependence between politics, science, morality, culture and religion.

From one standpoint, English intellectual life has been the work of groups of friends who have shared assumptions, beliefs and enthusiasms, and have used whatever instruments they have had to hand to propagate these for the benefit of the nation. From another point of view, it has been conducted by self-ratifying élites which have used such power as they have had to make the nation what they have wanted to make it – not only the élites which centred around landed society, the City, the armed services, the public schools, Cambridge, Oxford, Parliament, the monarchy, the Inns of Court and the Church of England, but also the élites which centred around Manchester, Birmingham and Nonconformity, the trade-unions, the grammar schools, laboratory science and further education, and the civic and plate-glass universities. All of these have been important, but it is the encounter between them and the effect of the first set of élites on the rest which has been crucial since

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‘the aristocracy’ was ‘sent to the laundry’ and its ‘dye’ allowed to ‘run out into the washing’.

In these volumes the subject is the opinions of élites and their attempts to define and justify the authority they claim. The teaching of élites, and the tensions between them, have impinged continuously on the nation and have affected its judgements of practicability. Not all élites, however, have been equally well known. The Evangelical élite, the dissenting élites which attacked the Church of England, and the élites which made England the workshop of the world, *are* well-known. So are the royal élite, the Whig élite, the Tractarian élite, the Cecilian élite, the élite which flexed its muscles after the demise of the clerical university in the 1870s, the imperialist élite of the early twentieth century, the élite of Balliol Idealists and the Fabian, Bloomsbury and King’s élites. But less is known about the Carlylean, Byronic and Tennysonian élites, the élites which admired Browning and T. S. Eliot, the mathematical and philosophical élite of Trinity College, Cambridge, the optimistic student élite of the 1930s, the élite of grammar-school boys who made their way after 1940, the resentful student-revolutionary élite of the 1960s, and the élite of public servants, judges and lawyers which has been present throughout.

The arguments with which élites have convinced themselves that they have authority are to be found in every chapter of this work. But so is the wish to disguise authority by making it seem natural or unavoidable, even when this has involved self-deception or the conscious deception entailed by the attempt to please, or at least not to offend, a democratic public.

The ratification of authority is no less central in a democratic society than in the less open societies of the past, and we should not be surprised either that subterfuge and exaggeration are as common as frankness and sincerity or that the community of sentiment which binds élites to peoples is often random and imperfect.

The thinkers we are discussing have borne witness to the matters they address with a weight, length and self-confidence which suggests that the truths to be conveyed are so significant that they can be conveyed again and again in as many variants as the situation requires and the exponents of critical sifting judge that it should be. Writing is not necessarily self-conscious or coherent; some writers just write, as Dickens wrote, or write what they feel able or obliged to write *ex animo*. Indeed, even ‘great writers’ bring together thoughts which have no necessary connection with one another and conceal the tenuousness of the connections by means of style or eloquence. These volumes attend primarily to meaning and to content insofar as it illuminates meaning. The meanings they discuss are reactions to subjective crises among the thinkers, generations and institutions concerned and to the external crises which have transformed the maritime, agrarian, insanitary England of the eighteenth century into the industrial-suburban, technologically advanced England of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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Some thinkers confine themselves to the reiterations of simple conceptions. Some dazzle, as Newman and Macaulay dazzled, by the intensity of their perceptions and their power to marry message to medium. But, since few have avoided the balkanization of thought, our subject-matter consists of specialist exhibits – the work of historians, lawyers, scientists, philosophers, politicians, journalists, dons, schoolmasters, theologians, novelists, musicians, architects and poets. To these could have been added civil servants, soldiers, explorers, missionaries, doctors, painters, engineers, film-directors, town-planners, impresarios, entertainers, managers of finance, commerce and industry, and the controllers of newspapers, wireless and television who have all contributed to the transformation from a predominantly Anglican and landed-aristocratic, via a bourgeois-dissenting, to a meritocratically ‘democratic’ England, as the second British Empire and the strongest capitalist economy in the world have risen and declined, an illiterate people has become a literate people, and a nation which found itself in Victorian prosperity, religion and respectability, and in duty, decency and death in two world wars, has lost itself in liberation, denigration, moral uncertainty and an over-heavy State.

Criticism of earlier volumes of this work has been implied on three grounds – that it offers venom and polemic where scholarly modesty suggests the need for analysis; that it misrepresents the English intelligentsia by concentrating on its arguments rather than on the milieux in which its arguments were developed; and that it infringes the rule that ‘judgement’ on an historical subject involves ‘assumptions and values’ which are ‘outside the province of the historian’. The assumptions in this work are that venom and polemic can disclose the historical process as readily as modesty and analysis can, that *Religion and Public Doctrine* resembles Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire* and Macaulay’s *History of England* in making venom and polemic central to its argument, and that contraction in the scope of historical statement will in any case be powerless against historians who will not be persuaded by professional modesty into removing ideological ‘assumptions and values’ from their history. Historical thinking is not the only form of thinking which needs to be rescued from ideological correctness. But because historical writing is central to modern culture, it is true especially of historical thinking that the best way to level the field between correctness and its enemies is through a *conservative* deconstruction which understands that all historical writing is subjective, that it is all the invention of a past out of material which is present, and that the past owes its vitality to the historian’s present interests and sympathies as much as it owes its plausibility to his power to meet the requirements of professional verification. Even when the past in this sense emerges unasked, or is presented ironically, it discloses the

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deepest layers of the historian's mind, operates at levels where assumptions are generated prior to explicit consideration, and enables history to unfold itself as a subtle experience in which problems resolve themselves into that ceaseless flow of felt comprehension which is arrived at when, as T. K. Cheyne put it over a hundred years ago, the 'inner' and the 'outer' histories coincide.

This felt comprehension is what this work discloses and, though it gives due weight to differences between thinkers from the same milieu, it reaches down to a primordial unity of thought – a unity in which poets, novelists or theologians of a particular experience, formation and generation, display the same pre-specialized mentalities as historians of the same experience, formation or generation and all mentalities are religious, if only in the sense, which F. M. Cornford as a post-Christian rationalist mistrusted, of a 'history . . . which, long before . . . a . . . work was even contemplated, was already inwrought into the very structure of the author's mind' and reflected an intimacy the 'modern mind' had difficulty recapturing between 'departments of thought' which had come to be 'completely dissociated' since Plato and Pythagoras.

What is being proposed is a perspective in which religion is indestructible and there is a continuity between Christianity and the post-Christian and anti-Christian religions which deny continuity with it. This is not an original perception. But it is crucial in encouraging an equality of consideration between Christianity and its enemies and in demolishing the claim to self-ratifying superiority which has been so central a feature of both post-Christian and anti-Christian thought in modern England.

This Introduction has sketched, in outline, some of the opinions which have constituted English thinking about religion in the last century and a half. The indication of parameters and the contrast between thinkers who have wished to know about religion and thinkers who have wished not to know about it, will make it easier to evaluate the indubitably religious thought which we are to discuss in the next twenty-three chapters, beginning in the first ten or so chapters with the advocates of a reanimated or reconstructed Christianity.