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RELIGION AND PUBLIC DOCTRINE IN
MODERN ENGLAND

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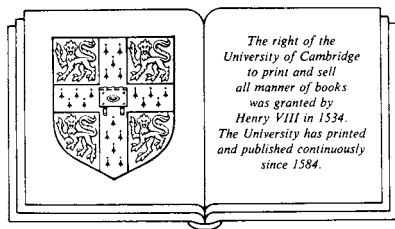
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RELIGION AND PUBLIC DOCTRINE IN MODERN ENGLAND

Volume II: Assaults

MAURICE COWLING

Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge



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Foreword

As in Volume I, footnotes have been kept to a minimum, being normally biographies of thinkers mentioned in the text and being designed to illustrate the length and range of their literary lives rather than to provide bibliographical comprehensiveness. Where necessary, in order to keep tenses consistent or sentences in shape but without alteration of the meaning, alterations have been made in quotations which appear in the body of the text. The endnotes indicate the locations of all quotations as well as the sources from which the book has been constructed. There is no other bibliography since Volume III will include a bibliographical discussion of the subjects discussed in all three volumes.

For help in tracing articles and books or in checking references and proof-reading, the author is indebted to Mr Alun Vaughan and to librarians in the Cambridge University Library (especially Mr Nigel Hancock and Miss J. Fairholm). He is indebted to Mrs J. G. W. Davies and Mrs Pamela Stockham for typing, and to the Cambridge History Faculty and the British Academy for grants from their funds. Mr W. J. Davies, Mr Richard Fisher and Ms Linda Randall of the Cambridge University Press have helped in preparing the book for publication. The index has been prepared by Mrs I. K. McLean. Mrs H. M. Dunn, the Fellows' Secretary at Peterhouse, has given invaluable and unstinted help throughout.

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reading and commenting on the type script as a whole the author is grateful to Mr Charles Covell, Mr Ian Harris, Professor E. Kedourie and Dr Jonathan Parry. The Master and Fellows of Peterhouse have continued to provide conditions in which work can be done, the Master, Lord Dacre, in particular, by reason of the brilliance of his enmities, the Enlightened nature of his sympathies and the chronologically locatable character of his distaste for intellectual Toryism and ecclesiastical Christianity, providing goads and spurs of the impact of which he has almost certainly been unaware.

November 1984

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*Projected contents of Volume III
(for publication c. 1988–90)*

INTRODUCTION

I THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECT AND MODERN THOUGHT IN
MODERN ENGLAND

II THE POST-CHRISTIAN CONSENSUS

CONCLUSION: RELIGION AND PUBLIC DOCTRINE IN MODERN
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‘A great man does not sit down to work, out of some intellectual notion of advancing his science or department ... The great books of any time are those which are called forth by the consciousness that there is some great work to be done.’ Rev. E. B. Pusey *Collegiate and Professorial Lectures and Discipline* 1854 p. 43.

‘To hasten this slow process of disintegration, to dissolve the old associations of ideas, and bring about their crystallisation round a new framework of theory, is a task to be performed slowly and tentatively even by the acutest intellects. Even when the reason has performed its part, the imagination lags behind. We may be convinced of the truth of every separate step in a scientific demonstration ... and yet the concrete picture which habitually rises before our mind’s eye may express the crude old theories which we have ostensibly abandoned ... It is no wonder, then, if the belief, even of cultivated minds, is often a heterogeneous mixture of elements representing various stages of thought; whilst in different social strata we may find specimens of opinions derived from every age of mankind. When opinion has passed into this heterogeneous state, the first step has been taken towards a complete transformation.’ Leslie Stephen *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* 1876 vol. i p. 5.

‘I am speaking of evils which in their intensity and breadth are peculiar to these times. But I have not yet spoken of the root of all these falsehoods – the root as it ever has been, but hidden; but in this age exposed to view and unblushingly avowed ... I mean the spirit of infidelity ... You will find, certainly in the future, may more, *even now*, ... that the writers and thinkers of the day do not even believe there is a God. They do not believe ... the *object* – a God personal, a Providence, and a moral Governor; and ... what they *do* believe, viz., that there is some first cause or other, they do not believe with faith, absolutely, but as a probability.

You will say that their theories have been in the world and are no new thing. No. Individuals have put them forth, but they have not been current and popular ideas. Christianity has never yet had experience of a world simply irreligious.’ Rev. J. H. Newman *The Infidelity of the Future, Sermon at the Opening of St Bernard’s Seminary, Olton, October 2 1873*, in C. S. Dessain (ed.) *Collected Sermons of Cardinal Newman* 1957 pp. 122–3.

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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

I

In *Religion and Public Doctrine* Volume I the author presented himself as the creation, or victim, of an intellectual experience. Volume I was not, however, an autobiography. What it did was extract from the experience it described prescriptive guidance about the ways in which England and the history of English thought should be understood.

From now on the author will evaporate. The rest of the work will display the assumptions that were displayed in Volume I but with a detachment which was absent there. In Volumes II and III the author will neither breathe down his own neck nor breathe down the reader's; here, so far as he can, he will deal with the past-as-it-was.

The past-as-it-was is an artifice, an irrecoverable entity which has little value except as illusion. The past-as-it-was is so intimately connected with the historian's mentality and reflects so much what the historian means that it ought theoretically to be avoided. In practice, of course, it cannot be avoided and nor is it avoided here. Pasts have to be displayed, and the past that is displayed here is a past whose leading feature is the erosion of English Christianity.

In England the erosion of Christianity has been irregular and has been closely connected with the revival of religion, beginning with the revivals of Christianity which were effected by Methodism, Evangelicalism and Tractarianism, continuing through the revivals of religion which were effected by Christianity's assailants, and being halted only when higher education, culture, science and respectability established an institutionalized neutrality between four conflicting attitudes in the twentieth century. Each of these attitudes has been an attitude to Christianity. Each has embodied an intellectual interest and each has produced a voluminous literature dedicated to its propagation. The aim in these volumes will be to unearth the assumptions in which these interests have been embedded, to examine examples of the literatures by which they have been upheld and to sketch the tensions through which they have been related to one another.

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The four attitudes are as follows. First, there has been a demand that the enmity towards Christianity which had begun in the eighteenth century should be put through an intellectual mangle and destroyed. Second, there has been an attitude of hostility to Christianity issuing in systematic demands for its supersession. Third, there have been attempts to protect Christianity by showing that it can cohere with non-Christian or anti-Christian thought, or can survive on sufferance alongside them. Finally, there has been an attitude which has assumed that both Christian and anti-Christian thought can be bypassed or absorbed so long as religion is interpreted as normality, sincerity, decency, science, scholarship, discrimination, or whatever secular value is held up for admiration.

These attitudes form the subjects of the six Parts which will make up this volume and the next. They will be presented in the forms they have taken in the writings of about eighty thinkers. Many other thinkers were available for consideration; those who have been considered combined explicitness of argument, comprehensiveness of range and that capacity to exemplify which permits an historical statement to be made through the intellectual biographies of representative individuals.

The idea of exemplification by representative individuals is fundamental. Almost all the thinkers discussed here commanded extensive attention among the educated classes and were able to do so as much because they were receptive to prevailing ideas as because they gave new twists to them. Few of their ideas were new. Some of them had been discussed continuously since the Reformation and many more since the French Revolution; they came to appear original only in so far as the thinkers concerned altered relations between them, stamped them with their own minds and styles, and sent them off into the future with a transformed significance.

The achievement of the thinkers who are to be discussed in Part I was to lay the foundations for the only powerful assaults on the enemies of Christianity that have been made in England since the early nineteenth century. These assaults were varied in range and content. But they were all set off by hostility to the eighteenth century and by the bitter belief that something wicked had been done to Christianity since 1688. It was this that supplied the stimulus to counter-revolution, the animus against Victorian Infidelity and the impetus to belligerence which the Roman Catholic thinkers discussed in Part IV were to renew in face of the indifference they were to intuit once Infidelity had been turned from an argument into an assumption.

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Parts II and III will discuss the assaults on Christianity which have been made since 1840. There had been assaults before 1840, and many of the writers who wrote after 1840 assumed that their own assaults were continuations of them. The eighteenth-century assaults, however, had been elbowed aside by Romanticism, evolutionary or historical science and the reconstruction that was implicit in the French Revolution. It is because thought had been complicated in these ways that 'The Assault on Christianity' begins with Mill, whose intellectual development summarized the transition, and goes on to Buckle, Lewes, George Eliot, Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall, Stephen, Harrison, Morley and Reade in one direction and to Tylor, Frazer, Murray, Wells, Shaw, Ellis, Maugham, Russell and D. H. Lawrence in another.

Alongside the Tractarian and Roman Catholic counter-revolutions discussed in Parts I and IV, there have in the period covered by this book been many types of apology for Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and Nonconformity and innumerable statements of the claim that Christianity is capable of accommodating itself to any power that modern thought might establish – astronomy, geology, history, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology in one mode, Rationalism, Liberalism, Socialism, Feminism, Marxism, Conservatism, sexual permissiveness, even Infidelity, in another. Evangelical and ritualistic mindlessness, the more central apologies for Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and Nonconformity, and the sometimes painful combination of solemnity, patience, timidity, earnestness, long-suffering, scholarship and virtue embodied in the accommodating type of Christianity, will supply the subject for 'The Christian Intellect and Modern Thought in Modern England' in the first Part of Volume III.

The attempt to reconcile it to modern thought and to proclaim modern thought's powerlessness to harm it have been leading features of twentieth-century English Christianity, but in spite of a visibly continuous presence in English life, there has been a fundamental deterioration in Christianity's power and influence. The concluding Part of Volume III – 'The Post-Christian Consensus' – will reflect this deterioration. It will assume that twentieth-century indifference is more fundamental than Victorian Infidelity and that its depth and pervasiveness are to be measured not so much by external observance as by an internal transformation resulting from the successful propagation and unselfconscious acceptance of simplified variants of the arguments and assumptions that were the stock-in-trade of the thinkers discussed in 'The Assault on Christianity' and 'The Assault on Christianity in the Twentieth Century'.

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These arguments and assumptions were the outcome of a discussion in which Jewish, Greek, Latin and Christian thinkers, and Western European thinkers from Alcuin to Goethe and Goethe to Freud, have been as important as the Empiricism, Romanticism, Darwinianism and lapsed-Protestant virtue of the English. In each generation in England the discussion has been anglicized; in the last half-century it has been freed from animus and assault and has contributed to the entrenchment of a body of prejudices which is not very different from that described in 'The Christian Intellect and Modern Thought in Modern England'. These prejudices constitute the most influential of contemporary mentalities. In 'The Post-Christian Consensus' they will be considered both as post-Christian analogues to the types of accommodating Christianity and as heirs to the types of normal thought which the English would have projected upon the world if they had not lost the will to do so.

There is, therefore, a fundamental difference between the present volume and Volume III. In Volume III the subject will be the accommodations which have been effected as the anti-Christian and Christian armies have moved towards common positions. In this volume the subject is the tension which has arisen as the anti-Christian and Christian armies have met in battle – on the anti-Christian side through the line of thinkers which runs from Mill to Morley and Murray to Russell, on the Christian side through the line which runs from Keble to Manning and Patmore to Greene. This has been the critical tension, and the reason for devoting a separate volume to it is that, if a strenuous battle had not been fought by the thinkers discussed here, the blander accommodators of Volume III would have had nothing to be bland about.

A work of this sort ignores the subtleties and coerces the intentions of the thinkers it discusses. It puts a straitjacket on literature and refuses to linger over its complications. It insists on its own interpretation and depends for its power on the plausibility of imposing it on the thinkers whose significance it is designed to illuminate.

In this connection a problem arises about the relationship between what thinkers thought or said they were doing and what interpretation represents them as doing. Most thinkers discussed in this volume, whether Christian or anti-Christian, can be represented as earning a living, pursuing a vocation or relieving their minds by imposing them on

the printed page. They can also be represented as claiming for themselves the attention which the clergy had claimed in the Middle Ages and as displaying moral concern or social anxiety about the philistine, democratic or proletarian threats which they believed were threatening literacy, civility and intelligentsia- and bourgeois-security.

Statements to this effect can be found in the writings of most thinkers in both groups. In neither group, however, were literacy, civility and security the predominant preoccupations which, as both groups understood it, were religion and the arguments that would need to be established in order to effect a religious reconstruction. All the thinkers concerned, whatever attitude they took to Christianity, took religion seriously, declined to explain it away in terms of something else, and assumed that the search for a right religion was a matter of the gravest consequence. And this is the point at which in this volume the argument stops. It assumes that religion is ultimate and ubiquitous and cannot be explained away in terms of something else, and that an essential preliminary to a comprehensive account of its rôle in contemporary English life is to describe the views which the English intelligentsia has taken of it during the century and a half which began when the religious structure of the ancien régime which had survived Pitt and the Jacobins was undermined by Wellington and Peel.

The régime whose destruction began in 1828 was the Anglican régime which had been created at the Reformation, consolidated during the reign of Elizabeth, destroyed in 1649, given new teeth in 1662 and made central by Sancroft in 1688. This régime was not as the Tractarians came to imagine it once they had turned against it; in some respects it came closer to the ideal they held up for admiration than any régime they could have expected to replace it with. But they were right to point out that, whatever intellectual influence had been acquired by Anglicanism's enemies previously or was to be retained by the Anglican Establishment thereafter, 1828/9 put the writing on the wall for Anglican pre-eminence in a confessional state. They were right to add that the repeal of the Test Act and the removal of Roman Catholic disabilities announced a future in which the Church of England would be competing on equal terms with Catholicism, Dissent, Judaism and Infidelity at the same time as the ancien régime was replaced by the more mobile régime symbolized by the railways, the Municipal Corporations Act, the provincial press, the extension of the Industrial Revolution beyond the iron and cotton and the expanded constituencies that were created by Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, 1884, 1918 and 1928.

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The supersession of the *ancien régime* was a gradual process masking a general crisis in which social and ideological continuities were less significant than the chronological simultaneity between the death of Anglican pre-eminence and the death of gentry and aristocratic pre-eminence. Between these two deaths the connections were complicated since many of the defenders of the *ancien régime* had been willing to soften, or abandon, its Anglicanism in order to protect it, and the Church of England, once deprived of pre-eminence, began slowly and disingenuously to make a virtue of detachment from unreconstructed political establishments. In this volume, nevertheless, the two deaths are inseparable. The thinkers it discusses were as much seized of the need for reconstruction in politics as of the need for reconstruction in religion; they all thought of themselves as engaged in a conflict of which the outcome would be provision not only of a new polity but also of a new religion for the English people.

In this volume and the next, the subject will be this new religion which will be discussed through those fundamental predispositions from which all public statement begins – in Volume III in the forms taken by the desire to avoid conflict, in this volume in the forms taken by the pursuit of conflict and the demand for argument as an instrument of conflict.

II

In reviewing Volume I of this work, the Provost of King's College, Cambridge, Mr Bernard Williams, wrote that it used Christianity as an 'instrument of sarcasm' and had 'dark associations' with that 'scepticism and distrust of all merely secular improvement' which was to be found amongst the more 'unreconstructed sort of cardinal' in the 'unliberated heartland of the Church of Rome'. These were flattering accusations – wounds which anyone should be pleased to bear; they showed that Provost Williams had understood that Volume I was designed to put question-marks against the assault on Christianity.

Since Volume I was subjective, it was easy to include thinkers whose attitude to Christianity was ambiguous, while excluding thinkers who were hostile. To that extent its strategy was blurred. In this volume the strategy will be less blurred. 'Secular improvement' will be examined – not all 'secular improvement' and not from an 'unreconstructed' standpoint, but secular improvement as a way of destroying Christianity and from a reconstructed standpoint which will respond as willingly to the

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conception of the 'unliberated' in the Church of Rome as Volume I responded to the conception of the 'unliberated' in the Church of England.

The conception of the 'unliberated' is important, not because the author is connected with the 'Roman ... heartland', assuming that such a thing exists, or has ever existed in the sense in which the Provost means it, outside the demonology of the Liberal mind, but because of the criticism it implies of the mentalities through which the assault on Christianity has been conducted in England. The conception of the unliberated is central, and the Tractarian and Roman Catholic mentalities of Parts I and IV are to be distinguished from the mentalities described in Parts II and III by reason of their resistance to liberation and the assumption that Christian freedom has to end in obedience.

The idea of obedience has been present in the assault on Christianity, as the Spencerian and Huxleyite emphases on obedience to Nature have shown. So has the prospect of liberation – from Liberalism, Rationalism and Respectability – in Tractarian and Roman Catholic apologetic. It remains true, nevertheless, that 'liberation' has been more intimately connected with the assault on Christianity than with Christian apologetic, and has been central to the assault as we shall be describing it.

One of the criticisms that the Provost of King's made of Volume I was that, in implying preferences among the opinions that it dealt with, it failed to provide arguments to justify them. The author is as sceptical about the use of argument in establishing preferences between religions as Mr Williams appears to be trusting. But Mr Williams was right to perceive that Volume I showed sympathy, as MacNeile Dixon had shown 'sympathy' in his Gifford Lectures of 1935, for the 'men of religion' as against the 'ethical idealists'; he would have been even more perceptive if he had understood that it aimed to challenge the imperviousness to argument which in contemporary England is to be found pre-eminently among Christianity's enemies.

As elsewhere, so in religion, argument is a way of proceeding, but it is not the only way. Minds find themselves saddled with beliefs as much as they choose them, and the most interesting thing to do with beliefs having found that one has them is not necessarily to argue them but to explore and enjoy them, or to affront other minds into considering them. This is why Volume I took the form it took – because it *used* opinions in order to manifest resentment. This is why Volume II will take the form that it will take – because it will use the Tractarian and

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Roman Catholic thinkers it discusses in order to point accusingly both at the aggressive secularity of the thinkers who master-minded 'The Assault on Christianity' and at the assumed secularity of the thinkers who have created 'The Post-Christian Consensus'.

In this work Tractarianism and Roman Catholicism are historical phenomena which give significance to a history that would be insignificant without them. They indicate, in ways which would be difficult for more compliant versions of Christianity, that Christianity has been under threat in England for a hundred and fifty years and that an important aid to judging the threat is to be found in that 'Jacobitism' or 'dandyism of the mind' to which reference was made at the end of Volume I.

In the preface to the second edition of *Oxford Apostles* in 1936 Sir Geoffrey Faber remarked that 'ordinary people' in the 1930s were reluctant to believe that Tractarianism could have any interest for them, and that the best way of establishing its interest was to investigate the Tractarians' sexuality, including their homosexuality. 'Taking off ... their surplices and cassocks' as he put it 'and presenting the Tractarians as ... men rather than priests' was illuminating so far as it went, and went a long way towards explaining the introverted intensity of Tractarian life. What it did not explain was the conspiracy element in Tractarianism – the assumption which most of the Tractarians made that they were at odds with the society of which they were a part.

This assumption was central to the Tractarian mentality which assumed that three centuries of Protestantism had not only subverted and parochialized English Christianity but had also made the English incapable of recognizing that anything was wrong. The Tractarians believed that there was an English disease, that Tractarianism was destined to cure it and that the cure was to be re-Christianization. What they did not see was how parochiality was to be destroyed, how protest was to be turned into a plan of action, and how re-Christianization was to occur.

Like the Tractarians, the Roman Catholics discussed in Part IV aimed to distance themselves from the modern mind, both by criticizing it and by offering it the possibility of conversion. Conversion can be a form of dandyism, religious conversion no less than any other, and this has been so in some of the cases discussed here even when it has arisen from the judgments that Infidelity has to be resisted and that Roman Catholicism is the only form of Christianity that is capable of resisting it.

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Like the defenders, most of the assailants of Christianity who appear in these pages underwent a conversion arising in their cases from the belief that rejection of Christianity was a form of manifest destiny in an historic crisis. The crisis was not the same in Spencer as in Newman; nor was it the same in Russell as in Manning. But there was a common thread – a belief that the present age demanded the special reactions which were indicated by the history of Europe since the conversion of Constantine and a conspiratorial understanding of the function of thought in relation to it.

In this volume, in addition to the Tractarian conspiracy, three conspiracies are central – Naturalism, Positivism and the Socialistic conspiracy of Shaw, Ellis, Wells and Russell. All three were total philosophies. All three demanded total reconstruction, and all three assumed that reconstruction in practice would depend on reconstruction in theory. All three aimed to bring practice closer to theory. All three were rebarbatively negative, all three were insistently constructive, and all three failed to establish themselves as the English religion which includes decency, respectability, mistrust of enthusiasm, an aversion to theory and an even greater aversion to the dogmatic expression of belief, and has slid towards humanism rather than Tractarianism only because it dislikes Tractarianism more.

The Tractarians were reactionaries who, whatever they said to the contrary, did not expect to prevail. For them the reality was suffering in face of evil and the impossibility of halting evil decisively. Nowhere in English thought in the last century and a half, except intermittently among Roman Catholics and insensitively among Evangelicals and dissenters, has there been any real belief that the negative tension which Tractarian talent demanded would be operating in a world to which Christianity had been restored, and it is in this sense that the Tractarians – and particularly the Anglican Tractarians – must be said to have felt the negative melancholy about Christianity's prospects which many humanist thinkers have felt about humanism's prospects in relation to Democracy.

In this volume Democracy appears as an opportunity, but it also appears as a threat – an opportunity because 'the masses' could be called into play to destroy the respectability of 'the classes', a threat because the mobilization of the masses could turn out to be as destructive of humanism as of Christianity. Among all three groups of humanists fear was restrained only by the conviction that History was on their side.

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In anti-Christian apologetic during the last century and a half, History has sustained two aggressive opinions – that historical consideration of the Bible has replaced a divine Jesus by a human one, and that historical consideration of the modern world has disclosed the liberation from authoritarian religion which has been affected by the Renaissance and Reformation, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the American, French and Russian Revolutions, and the sexual and psychological revolutions of the twentieth century. In Christian apologetic on the other hand History has sustained three defensive opinions – that, since God entered Time in Christ, Christianity is an historical religion to which historical scholarship brings decisive testimony, that the Middle Ages established Christianity's compatibility with both Nature and Reason and that since all past civilizations have been religious, a civilization like contemporary civilization, when it claims not to be, must be reinterpreted to show that it is.

These defensive tactics, however persuasive polemically, are indecisive for assent. As little as scientific investigation do critical exegesis and historical reconstruction resolve problems of assent unless there is a predisposition to resolve them. It is religion which resolves them, and it is with religion's rôle in doing this that this book is concerned – with those directions of the mind and will which precede and transcend all activities and subjects of study.

One of the most important achievements of a century and a half of biblical exegesis has been to confirm far more of a supernatural understanding of the Bible than it seemed likely to do in the 1840s. Rediscovery of a supernatural Bible, however, says nothing about the Bible's truth and objectivity and does nothing to resolve the question of belief, which is more problematical than in 1840 and has been made more problematical still by the establishment of a 'scientific' attitude.

During the last century and a half Science has played a fourfold rôle in English life. It has made possible an understanding and command of nature which was still a dream in 1840; it has supplied an instrument of education which was also a dream in 1840. Through governmental science it has created an Erastianism more effective than Anglican Erastianism; in company with History, for those who have wished to build on them, it has laid the foundations for a post-Christian religion.

The post-Christian religion as it had emerged by 1880 had three features which distinguished it from historic Christianity. It gave a geologically and astronomically validated chronology for the history of the universe, and excluded the biblical chronology; it gave a biologi-

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cally validated account of organic life, and excluded the biblical account of organic life; and it gave new twists to the doctrine of the regularity of nature and the inconceivability of divine intervention. It concluded that miraculous, or supernatural, Christianity was an impossibility, and that only obscurantism and superstition could pretend that it was not. And all this, though stated in the first place negatively, was converted by the minds and wills of its proponents into the positive religion which will be discussed in Parts II and III.

It would be easy to suggest that rejection of Christianity might have been avoided if dissenting and Evangelical thought had been stronger, if Christian imperviousness had not turned a negative criticism of ecclesiastical obscurantism into an intellectual rebellion, and if Lewes, Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall and the rest could have been presented with a revisionist Christianity which took account of what they were accustomed to call the 'criticism and philosophy of the nineteenth century'. Such fatuities are for the feeble-minded. The assumption here is that no one who did not want to create a post-Christian religion need have done so and that the effort which was made to do so between 1840 and 1930 was deliberate and acquired its authority from being deliberate.

Not all their practitioners treated History and Science as religion. But many of the most intelligent did and in order to do so had to turn them into something else – in the short run into literature, in the long run into academic disciplines.

English universities have for a long time been large, rich and significant, and are of first consequence for the understanding of the English mind. They are not now, however, and were not in the nineteenth century, the only channels of English public thought. In the nineteenth century the main channels, apart from the Churches, were parliament and literature, even when politicians and writers looked to reconstructed universities as the main channels of public thought in the future.

Of the thinkers discussed in this volume only Gladstone and Morley were parliamentary politicians, and neither is discussed primarily in that rôle. Both, and also Salisbury from Volume I, could have been discussed in that rôle, though it is likely that, if they had been, all three would have appeared to be less straightforward and categorical, and less anxious to create tension than they appear in their rôle as contributors to High Thought.

High Thought is as firmly embedded as High Politics in the interests, sympathies and aversions of its creators, and can be explained in terms

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of responses to publishers, audiences and antagonisms between authors in the same way that High Politics can be explained in terms of responses to constituencies, public opinion and antagonisms between politicians. Moreover, the practitioners of English High Thought, however disreputable personally, have displayed a high sense of national duty and consciousness and have done so even when they have confined themselves to long-term ineffabilities, have been free of assignable responsibility for the consequences of their opinions, and have used their freedom as speculatively and heuristically as freedom has been used in English universities since they ceased to be employment-agencies of the Church of England.

Among the thinkers who appear in Volume II only Huxley, Tyndall, Frazer, Russell, Murray and the Tractarians were teachers by profession, and none of these was limited by the specification of that function. Huxley and Tyndall were primarily researching scientists; Frazer thought of himself primarily as an 'educated man'. Russell and Murray inhabited a wider world than the world in which they taught, and even the Tractarians, whose aim was to capture a working university, thought of Oxford as an instrument of national regeneration. Moreover, since the most significant practitioners of High Politics in England in the last hundred years have been blander and more consensual about Christianity than Gladstone and Morley (in his early phase), and since modern universities are pre-eminently institutionalizations of the post-Christian consensus which will be the subject of Volume III, neither political nor university culture will receive systematic treatment here. Here, on the contrary, the principal subject will be literature – as a register of the nation's mind and as doctrine, both displayed and insinuated, about the way in which thought should be conducted and life lived, and the proper attitude to take to politics, morality and religion.

Literature as a register of the nation's mind is a concept which finds little favour among writers and teachers of literary studies in England where with honourable exceptions the norm for more than half a century has been practical criticism and analysis of language rather than elucidation of meaning, and where the concept of the inseparability of meaning from mode of expression and the suggestive ramifications of structuralism have not prevented the degeneration which so easily accompanies the conversion of a norm into an orthodoxy.

A properly entrenched and intelligent orthodoxy is as valuable as any of the skills which produce industrial and commercial revolutions.

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But the orthodoxy we are discussing is defective in three respects – because it is limited by its origin in a negative reaction against the blight cast by a degenerate philosophizing over Victorian and Georgian criticism, because it is insufficiently appreciative of the historically determined nature of the ghettos from which literatures emerge and because in its period of pre-eminence, while seeming to limit itself to judgments of taste and technique, it has insinuated assumptions which are as contentiously substantive as those which were insinuated by the philosophizing it was designed to replace.

Orthodoxies are valuable when they deepen faith or sustain conduct, and are based on a properly conceived understanding of the nature of existence. But there is no reason to believe that the orthodoxy we are criticizing meets either requirement. There is some reason to criticize it for considering literature in isolation from the persuasions it conveys and the conduct it implies. There is even more reason to suggest a disregard of the contradictions which accompany the widespread propagation through university faculties of a sensibility which imputes to literature the need to follow the requirements of argument or feeling, whatever the consequences for conduct.

To say this is not to demand the subjugation of literature to a moral or social purpose, the replacement of practical by philosophical or religious criticism or a revival of literary history in the manner of Saintsbury or A. W. Ward. It is simply a demand for minimum recognition that in present conditions there is much scope for a history of literature considered as doctrine and much need to open literature up to an articulated range of doctrinal considerations. Marxist criticism understands the need but in England has been incapable of meeting it. This book considers factors to which English Marxism is insensitive. It assumes that literature has been a significant register of the English intelligentsia's religion and must be understood not as ideology but as autonomous and self-confirming thought, and a genuine aspect of the intelligentsia's understanding of its public function.

England has had a low literature as well as a high literature, and a comprehensive discussion of our subject will involve discussion of Bradlaugh, Bottomley and Beaverbrook, for example, as well as Morley, Mallock and Gilbert Murray. In this volume, however, the subject is high literature, with low literature appearing only as a challenge to the control which the intelligentsia has wished to exercise over popular thought and feeling.

High literature has a limited audience and a limited appeal. But it

was for three centuries a crucial instrument of public discourse and the means by which secular intelligentsias subverted kings and priests throughout Europe. Evaluation of the influence of secular intelligentsias in the urban and suburban societies of the last two centuries is a problem which lies in wait for the historian of the modern world. Should History despise the fertility with which secular intelligentsias have externalized their fantasies upon the public mind? Or should it admire the resolve and generosity with which they have poured out their hearts and minds in the service of the people? Are their works diseased assertions of subjective opinion, or are they high statements of public doctrine? These alternatives present themselves in discussing the intelligentsias whose conceptions have dominated modern Europe; they present themselves in discussing the intelligentsias whose conceptions have dominated modern England. In neither case are the alternatives simple, however, and nor should the resolution be. In approaching a resolution, it is sufficient for the moment to emphasize the centrality of the literature we shall be discussing and the importance of the self-identifications that it reveals, and to give full weight to the truth and significance of Carlyle's dictum, quoted at the beginning of Volume I and deserving to be quoted again here, that in a 'modern country', it is the writers of 'newspapers, pamphlets, poems and books' who constitute the 'working effective Church'.

Tractarianism was an attempt to bring Carlyle's 'working Church' under the influence of the ecclesiastical Church, to provide new ways of inserting a Christian component into the national life, and to make the nation understand that Christianity's future presented a problem. Whether there *was* a problem, whether it was prudent to draw attention to it, whether it might not have been wiser to drift on as the Tractarians believed that the Church of England had drifted on during the eighteenth century, whether it was not the Tractarians themselves who precipitated the crisis of which Christianity's assailants took advantage, are questions to which these volumes will give uncertain answers. What they will not be uncertain about is that what has happened since the Tractarians has confirmed as prophecy an analysis which was probably false as history, that the Tractarian analysis, however untrue about the world the Tractarians lived in, has become true about the twentieth century, and that the Tractarians were right to suggest that, unless the assault on Christianity was challenged and contested at every turn, it would succeed in institutionalizing the post-Christian consensus with which we live now.

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It is one of the established banalities of post-Romantic historiography that historians mirror chiefly themselves and their own times and in this sense create the pasts that they claim to mirror. This book has been written in the shadow of the banality and also of the power of the idea that the past-as-it-was is unknowable. It recognizes that the search for the past of the nation to which an historian belongs is likely to mirror the historian's past rather than the nation's and that mirroring is not only unavoidable but also desirable in so far as it is part of the process by which historians contribute towards conceptualizing the future.

The 'past-as-it-was' imposes a discipline and draws a contrast with the present. But its immensity has become burdensome and the search for it professionalized to a point of imbecility. The reader who looks for it in these pages will deserve to be disappointed and if, notwithstanding, he expects to find it, he should do so in full awareness of the fact that every serious historian ratiocinates the past that he needs.

The past that an historian needs is the past that he wishes to propose in the situation that he is addressing, and a past which might be suitable for one situation might not be suitable for another. In this work, out of all the pasts which might have been proposed, the author has proposed the past that he thinks the situation needs – a textual history of religion which shows the edifice of belief being taken down brick by brick and many Christian bricks being discarded, and the outcome of which has been the tension between Christianity and its assailants which has formed the theme of this introduction. This tension, even when relegated to the recesses of the public mind, is the central feature of the modern English situation. It is also the tension to which all other tensions have to be related.