CHAPTER 1

Introduction: 'Papal Aggression'

The enemy has come.

The Illustrated London News[1]

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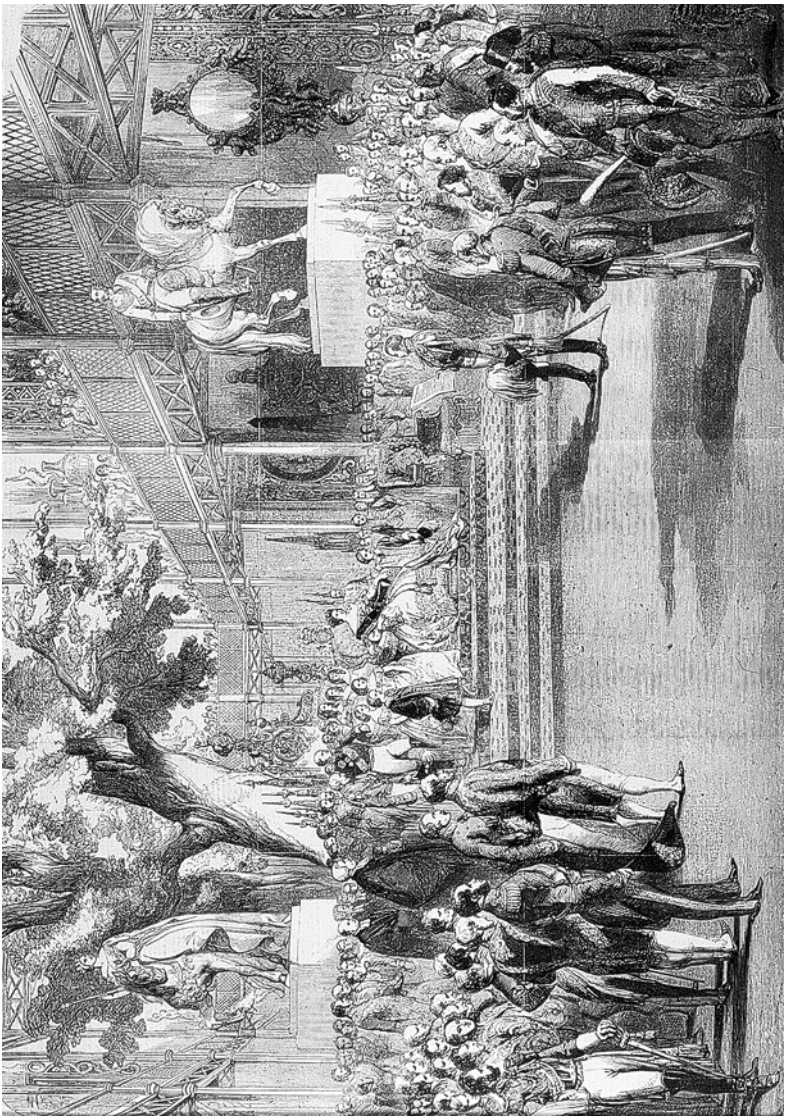
Queen Victoria sits on a raised throne at the opening of the Great Exhibition, listening to an address by her uniformed consort, Prince Albert, President of the Royal Commissioners (illustration 1). A less private communication between husband and wife is difficult to imagine. This couple have the highest profiles in the land and are here playing out their public roles. The speaker reads the address on behalf of a group. The listener attends to the address as the reigning monarch. The address is written with not only the royal listener in mind, but also the surrounding crowds of people, who themselves represent different constituencies, at home and abroad.

The Commissioners have encouraged exhibitors to send material from overseas and from all over Britain to London, capital of the world's first industrialized nation, where the latest products of modern manufacture can now be admired. The main political aim of the project is to display and celebrate Britain's own technological supremacy. Joseph Paxton's cathedral of glass, complete with 'nave' and 'transepts', is also a pleasure dome, a miracle of rare prefabrication. Large equestrian statues of the royal couple flank the dais. The galleries above are crowded with eager spectators. The tree that fills the space between the galleries has been cleared of birds by sparrow-hawks, on the advice of the aged Duke of Wellington, whose birthday it is today and who was cheered by the crowds on his arrival.

The opening of the Great Exhibition, on 1 May 1851, is a familiar enough scene. Two details are usually overlooked, however: the figures standing in

[1] Anon., 'The Papal Aggression', *Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1850, p. 358.



1. 'Inauguration of the Great Exhibition Building, by Her Majesty, May 1, 1851', *The Illustrated London News*, 18, 481 (3 May 1851), 350–1.

the foreground, facing Her Majesty, and the figure to her right, in front of the tree, who is dressed in a black gown, Geneva bands (like those of Swiss Calvinists) and a wig. The latter is the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner, whose role is to offer a special benediction, addressed to Almighty God on behalf of, and in the hearing of all who are present. This is to be followed by the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's *Messiah*.[2] Behind him stand other senior clerics, two of whom also wear wigs. The message is clear: the Church of England can give its blessing to modernity and to what the current Whig government at least regard as 'progress'. The figures in the foreground are foreign ambassadors, dressed in splendid ceremonial uniforms, and many of them are Catholics. They are witnessing a very English ceremony, mounted by Church and State. It is poised, polished, and Protestant.[3] For Continental Catholics, it must seem like another world – economically, politically, culturally and, above all, spiritually.

One of the presiding clergy on the great day was Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, who had preached at the Queen's coronation back in 1838, and in 1850 had appointed a committee 'for providing foreigners and other strangers with the means of attending divine worship during the period of the Exhibition'.[4] 'Let us not welcome them to this great emporium of the world's commerce', he said in his charge to the London clergy at St Paul's Cathedral, 'as though we looked only to the gratification of our national pride, or to mutual improvements in the arts, which minister to the enjoyment of this present life, and took no thought of the spiritual relation which subsists between all mankind as children of God, whom he desires to be saved through Jesus Christ'.[5] Although Blomfield's tone would have appealed particularly to the Evangelicals among the London clergy, their Broad Church brethren and the (often troublesome) High Church Tractarians would have broadly agreed with their tenor. Yet most of them, particularly in the Evangelical and Broad Church parties, would also have believed that the historic links between Church and State under the Crown were the key to the nation's material prosperity, and that politics and religion were inseparable.[6] Five years before the Duke of Wellington

[2] Anon., 'The Great Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, 3 May 1851, p. 349.
[3] In her coronation oath, Queen Victoria had promised to 'maintain the Laws of God, the true Profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Religion established by Law', and had received a copy of the Bible, the 'most valuable thing that this world affords': Anon., *Form and Order of the Service* (1838), pp. 27, 41.
[4] Anon., 'Great Industrial Exhibition of 1851', *Illustrated London News*, 23 November 1850, p. 399.
[5] Anon., 'The Bishop of London's Charge', in Anon., *Roman Catholic Question* (1851), 2nd series, p. 12.
[6] A conservative, Anglican weekly newspaper entitled the *Church and State Gazette* was published between 1842 and 1856.

brought in unpopular Catholic emancipation legislation in 1829, Robert Southey had celebrated the Established Church of England on precisely these grounds, in *The Book of the Church*.[7]

Like other clerical and lay members of the British Establishment gathered in Hyde Park, however, Bishop Blomfield had witnessed a series of deeply unsettling events in England since the mid-1840s. Social and political tensions in the 'Hungry Forties' had been caused by increased Irish immigration during the railway boom and the potato famine (1845–9), the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), a cholera epidemic (1847) and Chartist riots (1848). Fierce religious controversy had arisen on several occasions: when John Henry Newman, the spiritual leader of the Tractarians, converted to Rome and took others with him (1845); when Sir Robert Peel's Tory government subsidized the Catholic College of St Patrick, Maynooth (1845); when Lord John Russell – the next, Whig Prime Minister – offered the Bishopric of Hereford to Renn Dickson Hampden, whose liberal views were regarded as heterodox by the Tractarians (1847); when Bishop Henry Phillpotts of Exeter refused to institute George Cornelius Gorham – a case that turned on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and the question of Church authority, and that deeply divided Evangelicals from Tractarians (1847–50); and, most recently, when the Pope restored the Roman Catholic episcopal hierarchy in England and Wales (1850).

Blomfield had felt an 'unwonted degree of anxiety and difficulty' in November 1850, when addressing his clergy, convened at St Paul's Cathedral for the sixth time since his appointment by the Duke of Wellington in 1828. In his charge, which was published and widely quoted as a public utterance, he first defended his position on 'The Gorham Controversy'.[8] Then he turned to the resulting 'Recent Recessions to Rome' and the vexed question of 'Romanising Innovations in Public Worship' – the subject of voluminous correspondence between himself and the more extreme ritualists among the Tractarians.[9] These 'Anglo-Catholic' tendencies caused widespread anxiety at mid-century. It was his next subject, however, that had convulsed the nation: 'Aggressive Movements of the Papacy'.[10] For on 29 September 1850, the feast of St Michael and All Angels, Pope Pius IX ('Pio Nono') had announced from Rome that the Catholic hierarchy of England was to be

[7] See pp. 144–5 below.
[8] The Bishop 'did not concur' with the judgment for Gorham: Anon., *Gorham* v. *Bishop of Exeter* (1850), p. 2.
[9] See A. Blomfield, *Memoir of Blomfield* (1863), II, 136–47.
[10] Anon., 'The Bishop of London's Charge', in Anon., *Roman Catholic Question* (1851), 2nd series, pp. 1–10.

2. 'Piux IX, Pontifex Maximus', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann *et al.*, 16 vols. (New York: Encyclopedia, 1913–14), XII, 134.

restored. Blomfield's response was representative: 'The assertion now first made of the Pope's right to erect Episcopal Sees in this country appears to me to be, not only an intentional insult to the Episcopate and clergy of England, but a daring though powerless invasion of the supremacy of the crown.'[11]

Pio Nono (illustration 2), a vilified 'foreign prince' in the autumn of 1850, had previously been regarded in England as a reforming, liberal

[11] For detailed accounts of the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy, see O. Chadwick, *Victorian Church* (1966–70), Pt 1, pp. 271–309; E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism* (1968) and *English Catholic Church* (1984); D. G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism* (1992).

Pope,[12] who had himself suffered at the hands of his own people, when he was forced to flee from Rome in disguise in November 1848, returning only in April 1850, with the aid of the French. Five months later, the long delayed bull was interpreted as 'Papal Aggression', through one of the strongest misreadings in modern British history. It was addressed to the universal Roman Church, but in particular the Catholic minority in England and Wales. It was also read, however, by the Protestant majority, of whom even the better educated were unfamiliar with its conventions – ecclesiastical, diplomatic, linguistic and spiritual. The 'Letters Apostolical' first addressed the most vehemently contested subject in the many battles between English Protestants and Catholics in the nineteenth century – English history.[13] The rich and complex story of the Reformation was remembered with pride by Dissenters and by Anglican Evangelicals and Broad Churchmen, notwithstanding Henry VIII's marital motives. The Papal bull simply referred to the 'Anglican schism of the sixteenth age',[14] and went on to explain that, in the seventeenth century, England had been divided into four administrative Districts, each overseen by a 'Vicar Apostolic'. In 1840, 'having taken into consideration the increase which the Catholic religion had received in that kingdom', Pope Gregory XVI had doubled their number.

Now, ten years later, having 'invoked the assistance of Mary the Virgin, Mother of God, and of those Saints who illustrated England by their virtues', Pio Nono decreed that, 'in the kingdom of England, according to the common rules of the Church, there be restored the Hierarchy of Ordinary Bishops, who shall be named from Sees, which we constitute in these our Letters, in the several districts of the Apostolic Vicariates'.[15] In order to further the 'fruitful and daily increasing extension' of Catholicity in England, the diocese of Westminster was elevated to 'the degree of the Metropolitan or Archiepiscopal dignity', the remaining twelve bishops to serve as his suffragans.

It was announced on the same day that Nicholas Wiseman, formerly Vicar Apostolic of the London District, was to be Archbishop of Westminster (illustration 3). To most English ears, this was to sound like a

[12] 'The Pope himself has turned reformer': W. Empson, 'The Papal States', *Edinburgh Review*, October 1847, p. 496.
[13] See chapters 3 and 4 below.
[14] 'Letters Apostolical, – Pius P. P. IX', in Anon., *Roman Catholic Question* (1851), 1st series, p. 1.
[15] Westminster, Southwark, Hexham, Beverley, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury, St David's (Wales being regarded as part of England for these purposes), Clifton, Plymouth, Nottingham, Birmingham and Northampton. Ibid., p. 2.

3. 'Dr Wiseman, appointed by the Pope Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster', *The Illustrated London News*, 17, 453 (2 November 1850), 341.

contradiction in terms, as no such title existed and Westminster symbolized the nation itself. Parliament met in the Palace of Westminster. Westminster Abbey, England's church and a shrine to England's monarchs and fallen heroes, was drenched in national pride and a semi-mystical sense of antiquity.[16] The Abbey had no bishop's throne, let alone an archbishop's, as it was a 'royal peculiar', with a Dean appointed by Queen Victoria, who was the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and who had been crowned there, like almost all of her predecessors. Leading English commentators, including the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, had formerly applied

[16] See, e. g., M. F. Tupper, 'The Abbey', in *Three Hundred Sonnets* (1860), p. 243.

territorial metaphors to the revival of Catholicism across Europe.[17] Now the Pope seemed to be invading the very citadel of England and its constitution.

Wiseman, still in Rome and, from 30 September, a cardinal with the title of St Pudentiana, made matters worse by sending a celebratory pastoral letter to English Catholics, 'From Without the Flaminian Gate of Rome', and couched in triumphalist terms, on 7 October. Again, he addressed his co-religionists but was also read, or rather misread by a Protestant nation. He and his fellow bishops were later to defend both the pastoral and the bull on the grounds that they referred to matters spiritual rather than temporal. This was not apparent at the time, however, and some of his phrasing offended Protestant readers when they saw a transcription of the pastoral in the newspapers. He wrote of continuing to 'govern' the counties under his administrative control, for example.[18] He believed that Catholic England had been 'restored to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament, from which its light had long vanished'.

When Victoria heard of all this she is said to have asked, 'Am I Queen of England or am I not?'[19] The story may be apocryphal, but it rings true. The Queen was in fact comparatively broad-minded on religious issues and disliked anti-Catholic propaganda directed against the Irish, who were her subjects. Her love of simple Bible-based worship, however, reflects a deeply Protestant spirituality, at a time when it was normal for the communion service to be celebrated only three or four times a year in Anglican churches. In the middle of the 'Papal Aggression' furore, she attended a church near Osborne in which the preaching of 'the Word' was literally elevated above all other aspects of worship: access to the chancel was gained by passing *under* the pulpit (illustration 4).[20] The contrast with the elaborate ceremonials favoured by the 'Ultramontane' Cardinal Wiseman, who emphasized Rome's jurisdiction beyond the Alps, could hardly be more striking (illustration 5).[21]

[17] 'During the eighteenth century, the influence of the Church of Rome was constantly on the decline. During the nineteenth century, this fallen Church has been gradually rising from her depressed state and reconquering her old dominion.' T. B. Macaulay, 'Von Ranke', in *Critical and Historical Essays* (1848), III, 253.

[18] N. P. S. Wiseman, 'Pastoral', in Anon., *Roman Catholic Question* (1851), 1st series, p. 5.

[19] E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism* (1968), p. 56.

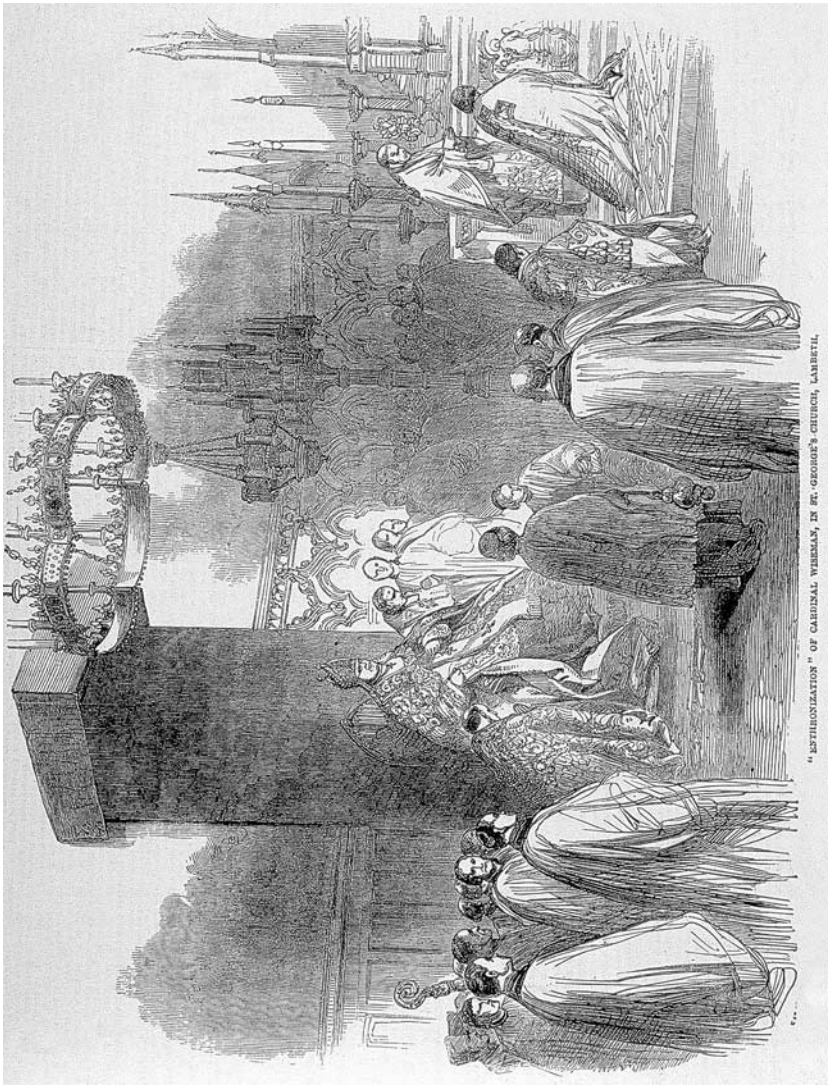
[20] 'Her Majesty and his Royal Highness, and the Princess Royal, and the ladies and gentlemen of the Royal household, attended divine service on Sunday morning, at Whippingham Church.' Anon., 'The Court at Osborne', *Illustrated London News*, 2 November 1850, p. 343.

[21] At his enthronement, 'a graceful canopy, fringed with silk and gold, was borne over his path by, as we were informed, the "converts" exclusively. . . . The mass was Haydn's, and performed by the choir in the most impressive style.' Anon., 'Papal Aggression', *Illustrated London News*, 14 December 1850, p. 457. On 'Word' and sacrament in Protestant and Catholic traditions, see G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (1963), p. 36.

4. 'Interior of Whippingham Church, Isle of Wight', *The Illustrated London News*, 17, 452 (26 October 1850), 337.

News of Pio Nono's bull reached London on 4 October 1850. Five days later, after a period of reflection, *The Times* initiated a campaign in defence of the constitution.[22] On 14 October, its first leader argued that the appointment of Wiseman was either 'a clumsy joke' or else 'one of the grossest acts of folly and impertinence which the Court of Rome [had] ventured to commit since the Crown and people of England threw off its yoke'. Referring to the Catholic revival within the Church of England (the 'Oxford Movement', or Tractarianism), it commented that the Pope had mistaken the 'renovated zeal of the Church in this country for a return towards Romish bondage'. Two words here – 'bondage' and 'impertinence' – provide clues to mainstream early-Victorian attitudes to Roman Catholicism. Their

[22] *Times*, 9, 14, 19 October 1850.



5. "Enthronization" of Cardinal Wiseman', *The Illustrated London News*, 17, 459 (14 December 1850), 457.