

part, tend to confuse Christianity with some of its transitory historical forms—and usually the worst, not the more constructive ones—with fascism or the right-wing clericalism that compromises with colonialism or totalitarianism to protect the Church as an Institution.

But both Christians and Marxists are currently going through a process of honest, critical revision of our ideas, prejudices, attitudes and ‘hang-ups’ with regard to each other. Dialogue may not be easy, but it is possible and real, and an established fact. In practice, we are all (except for a few fanatics dominated by fear of change) agreed on the essential task: the problem of the hungry—hungry for bread, a roof, health, freedom, knowledge, brotherhood, dignity—is not solved by offering them an exhortation, or a flag or a philosophical doctrine, but by obtaining the *actual means* of satisfying their hunger. Freedom and what goes with it, is not asked for or given; it is *won*. This is what socialism is for us, and this is why we are with the Chilean people in the political mission they have chosen—to build not a European-style Christian Democracy but a Chilean socialism.

## The Earl of Shaftesbury and the ‘Papal Aggression’

### by Ronald Pearsall

The Earl of Shaftesbury and the ‘Papal Aggression’ of 1850 is an interesting example of how a man of sense and humanity can be driven by prejudice into taking a posture that contradicts everything he has striven for. What he did was of less importance than why he did it, for even at the time intelligent men were aware that Shaftesbury was obsessively involved in a storm in a tea-cup.

The term ‘Papal Aggression’ indicates how Shaftesbury’s contemporaries saw the Papal Bull of 1850; this Bull abolished the administration of Roman Catholics in Great Britain by Vicars Apostolic, and appointed instead two Archbishops and twelve Bishops with territorial districts clearly marked out. Shaftesbury was in Scotland recovering from illness when he heard about this. It was, he considered, ‘an act of great annoyance and audacity’ but not contrary to law, and he was prepared to simmer awhile.

When Dr Wiseman was appointed the first Archbishop of Westminster and raised to the dignity of a Cardinal, then Shaftesbury felt that he had no other course but to act, and the publication of the pastoral ‘From out of the Flaminian Gate of Rome’ was

interpreted by him as a direct threat towards the Church of England. 'Catholic England', wrote the Cardinal, 'has been restored to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament from which its light had long vanished'.

To the sensible, there was nothing very remarkable in this. The nineteenth century had been increasingly considerate of Nonconformism and the Evangelical movements that were eventually to form into the Salvation Army, and it was nine years since Newman had published his Tract 90 which, paradoxically, formed the apex and sealed the fate of the Oxford Movement, finishing it as a threat to the Established Church.

It may be that 1850 was a decisive year. The country was restless, though in 1851 the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace was to evoke a feeling that this was the way the world should go—industry and the triumph of materialism. A national slogan was wanted, and it was a matter of chance that the one selected was 'No Popery'. Had Sir Robert Peel still been Prime Minister he would certainly have placed no especial emphasis on the Papal Bull, but Lord John Russell was disposed to go along with the outcry, and on 4th November he wrote to the Bishop of Durham, denouncing the recent measures of the Pope as 'a pretension of supremacy over the realm of England, and a claim to sole and undivided sway, which is inconsistent with the Queen's supremacy, with the rights of our Bishops and Clergy, and with the spiritual independence of the nation'.

So Lord John prepared the scene, but he was not prepared to act further. *Punch* depicted him as an urchin writing 'No Popery' on walls and skulking around a corner to see what the result would be. Lord John gave the establishment seal of approval to anyone who wished to carry the matter further, and the Earl of Shaftesbury rose to the bait, his long-nurtured hatred of the Ritualists and the Puseyites coming to the fore. He saw himself as a David fighting against a grotesque Goliath, and his language in his diary took a turn into melodrama; he was ready, he claimed, 'to conflict with Infidelity and defy it', and in Edinburgh he looked about him to see what phenomena he could incorporate into this curious abstract Infidelity. Some evidence of his irrationality can be seen in that he saw in current philosophical trends confirmation of his fears that the Pope had malicious designs on Britain. He found the University 'rife with the German philosophy, and ecclesiastical Judases, pretending belief in the Holy Scriptures, betraying the Son of Man with a kiss', and as November went on his obsessions became more powerful. 5th November, Gunpowder Plot day, was an occasion for massive rejoicing.

It was all very well to vent his spite in Edinburgh, but he considered that he was needed in London, to gather the opposition together, and on 11th November he chaired a conference of clergy

and laity to see what could be done to counter the 'Papal Aggression'.

What was the opinion of the Queen on this matter? If anything Victoria was more inclined to take notice of anything Lord John Russell said because he was an ally against her enemy Lord Palmerston rather than because he occupied a place in her affections. In his letters to her, Russell had written that the Bull was nothing to be alarmed at; what was frightening was the growth of Roman Catholic practices within the Church of England. To Shaftesbury, the real enemy was the Ritualist movement; this was true, also, of Lord John Russell. In a letter dated 25th October, Lord John quoted Thomas Arnold: 'I look upon a Roman Catholic as an enemy in his uniform; I look upon a Tractarian as an enemy disguised as a spy'.

Queen Victoria was not ever-sensitive on church matters, except in so far as they affected politics, but the earnest warnings of her Prime Minister caused her to review events in the light of the assumed threat from Rome. There was trouble in Austria, and Victoria intuitively saw this as evidence that Russel was right—'I believe that Austria fans the flame at Rome, and that the *whole movement* on the Continent is *anti-Constitutional, anti-Protestant, and anti-English*'.

The anxiety was spreading throughout the country, fanned by the Earl of Shaftesbury and his myrmidons, and gradually the Ritualists became aware that public anger was beginning to be focused on them and not the Roman Catholics. When the Duchess of Norfolk wrote to Queen Victoria greatly worried by the Papal 'threat', the Queen told her that the real danger lay in the Ritualists and their 'extraordinary conduct'. As November gave way to December it was becoming obvious that things were getting out of hand; it was now this '*unfortunate* Papal Aggression business, which is still keeping people in a feverish state of wild excitement'.

Shaftesbury did not recognize the danger. He was proud of his work in fanning the flames, catalogued the meetings in every town and parish of the country, applauded the enthusiasm of the mob, and presided at a vast meeting at Freemason's Hall. Between 14th November and 30th November, no fewer than seventy-eight works dealing with the 'Papal Aggression' came from the presses, many of them rabid and vicious advocating a Holy War to end the threat once and for all.

The Bishop of Oxford, the celebrated Samuel 'Soapy Sam' Wilberforce, wrote to Shaftesbury a long almost incomprehensible letter advising him to tone down the opposition, that the whole affair was getting out of hand, but Shaftesbury ignored this, refusing to recognize that it was no longer an academic issue but that there was acute danger to life and limb. On 7th November the English Roman Catholics sent up an address of loyalty to the Queen,

attesting that the new organization of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain was purely spiritual.

The Ritualists, preoccupied with their own internal troubles, were fair game, and it seemed that everywhere the Bishops were siding with the mob, isolating them. With one exception. The Bishop of Exeter wrote to Pusey: 'Pray do not consider yourself under any restraint in preaching in my diocese'. Churchgoers who had frequented Ritualist churches because it was the smart thing to do were easily persuaded that it was unpatriotic and even treasonable to do so, and stayed away.

Left to itself, the whole matter would have died, but Shaftesbury and his supporters would not let it, and on 7th February, 1851, the Prime Minister introduced the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill to prevent Roman Catholic Bishops assuming territorial titles. It was not such an easy Bill to pass as Russell thought, for he had the opposition not only of the Roman Catholic Members of Parliament, but of the Radicals led by John Bright, and of men who although they were not Catholics wished to see tolerance prevail. Amongst these was Gladstone, who wrote to his friend Sir Walter James, 'I suspect John Russell has more rocks and breakers ahead than he reckoned upon when he dipped his pen in gall to smite the Pope'.

The professional promoters of acrimony, the popular press, were getting tired of it. One newspaper editor who every morning raked over the embers admitted to the Court gossip Greville that 'he thought the whole thing humbug and a pack of nonsense'. But the passion was so great in Parliament that by 395 votes to 63 the Bill was brought in, though its progress was halted by a ministerial crisis. The government was out of office. Shaftesbury fumed. The complex alliances of the House of Commons, the difficulties of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, these prevented a ministry forming, at least so long as the Bill remained in its present form.

Still as committed as ever, Shaftesbury wrote in his diary: 'Who can now assert that the Pope has no power in England? He has put out one Administration and now prevents the formation of another'. Was there anyone who could save the situation? Perhaps Prince Albert, the consort of the Queen. Albert was of little help, being considerably more interested in his pet project, the Great Exhibition.

Russell could get in again if he watered down the Bill, and this was done. The new Bill pleased no one, and although it was voted for by 438 and against by only 95, so successful were the rearguard actions that the Bill was not passed for five months. No one was less satisfied than Shaftesbury; he compared the Pope with the Napoleon of his most haughty and terrible days, and asserted that the Pope had virtually declared that the House of Hanover had ceased to exist, gratuitous information that flourished only in Shaftesbury's disturbed mind.

He felt enormously let down by his fellow countrymen, but he

made one great effort to recruit extreme Protestantism, arranging a meeting at a hotel in the Adelphi, at which it was decided to make the opposition to Roman Catholicism and those whom Shaftesbury considered fellow-travellers in the Church of England international. A Protestant association was formed from all nations.

A fortnight later Archdeacon Manning joined the Church of Rome, and four clergymen in Leeds did the same, and it was small comfort to Shaftesbury when the Bill was finally passed in July. The Great Exhibition was occupying everyone's attention, and the news of the Bill was treated with polite indifference; there was little triumph felt by even those who had spent many months forcing it through. Russell must have regretted that he ever ventured into ecclesiastical waters, for the controversy had sapped his ministry. Gladstone forecast that the Bill would not remain in the statute book for long, that from the first it would prove to be a dead letter; in both these, Gladstone was right, and the law was struck from the statute book in 1871.

The 'Papal Aggression' had proved profitable to Gladstone. By standing out against the intoxicated fervour of the Houses of Parliament he had proved himself a man of honour, not to be swayed by an appeal to the emotions. During the course of the debates he had delivered one of the best speeches of his career, packed with closely-knit theological argument that bemused his opponents. The radical wing of the Liberal Party had been impressed by his willingness to go into the same lobby with John Bright to vote against the Russell act.

Shaftesbury returned to the field where he had done, and was to do, most good—the help and redemption of the poor. The Ragged School boys of London were employed as boot-blacks, regular stations were provided by Shaftesbury and his associates, and twenty-five poor boys cleaned 101,000 pairs of shoes or boots, for which the public paid £500.

His next venture into ecclesiastical matters in 1855 was much happier. He supported the Religious Worship Bill which was to replace the Conventicle Act, which forbade church services to be held in other than approved places. During 1854 the City Mission had held no less than 25,318 meetings, of which 22,000 were illegal, and which could have been stopped had the law been enforced. Shaftesbury was motivated solely by altruism and the desire to administer to the spiritual needs of the masses, and therefore it is even more difficult to understand why he had acted with such inhumanity and impetuosity in the case of the Papal Bull of 1850.

Difficult, perhaps, but not impossible, for if one sees the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury acting in the tradition of the previous earls, then much is made clear. His heredity contained a built-in prejudice against Roman Catholicism, and his actions during the years 1850-1851 parallel those of the first Earl of Shaftesbury at the time

of the 'Popish Plot' (1678-1680). The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury did not instigate the furore against the 1850 Papal Bull; he left that to Lord John Russell. Similarly the first Earl of Shaftesbury, notorious for the Habeas Corpus Act, used the 'Popish Plot' as a spring-board to assuage his own turbulent fantasies, and was ever ready to make capital out of religious animosities. Again, like, the seventh Earl, he did much to ease the path of the Dissenters. His venom was directly at Roman Catholicism.

The seventh Earl had been working his way to the confrontation of 1850-1851. As early as 1841 he had overstepped the bounds of courtesy in his exchanges with the Ritualists, and Gladstone urged restraint in the interest of the Church. Pusey wrote the Earl a conciliatory letter, beginning 'You have not probably grey hairs, as I have, nor have you had sorrows like me, and both ought to soften your mind'. Temporarily, Shaftesbury was abashed, but this state of mind did not last long, and very soon he was in the arena again, the inheritor of the first and third Earls of Shaftesbury, acting out traditional roles in a situation as far removed from the seventeenth century as one can imagine.

It was said of the brother of John Henry Newman that he was a good man always in the wrong. In ecclesiastical matters, this may well be Shaftesbury's epitaph.

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COMMENT (*continued from page 345*)

if it can be made clear that it is not just another form of British occupation but the road to a genuinely independent Irish state of the North, then not only the Social Democratic and Labour Party but the majority of the Catholics and even the Official IRA (who have, of course, nothing to do with the Provisionals) might be persuaded to accept it. None of this is very likely on the face of it, but the people on either side—despite the rhetoric of politicians and press—are not monsters, and in the face of the appalling alternative of tribal war they may be prepared to compromise a little.

H.McC.

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