“Papists” and Prejudice
“Papists” and Prejudice: Popular Anti-Catholicism and Anglo-Irish Conflict in the North East of England, 1845-70

By

Jonathan Bush
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CONVENTIONS

County Durham refers to the pre-1973 boundaries of the old county of Durham and is used throughout to avoid confusion with the city of Durham. The county at this time stretched from the south of the Tyne to the northern banks of the Tees (including Stockton and Hartlepool). Tyneside incorporates those settlements on the banks of the Tyne (including Tynemouth, North Shields, Wallsend and Newcastle).

The word “Evangelical(s)” (upper case) refers exclusively to the distinctive body of Low-Church Anglicans of that name. The word “evangelical(s)” (lower case) refers either to the general culture itself or evangelicals of all persuasion. However, capitalisation of organisation names, such as the Evangelical Alliance, is retained.

The word ‘popular anti-Catholicism’ in the title, and its usage throughout the text, refers to a culture shared by all classes (including both lay and clerical), rather than a specific class grouping (such as the working class) or a specific religious denomination.
ABBREVIATIONS

TWAS   Tyne and Wear Archives Service
DCRO   Durham County Record Office
DULSP  Durham University Library Special Collections
RCHNDA Roman Catholic Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Archives
INTRODUCTION

Until comparatively recently, anti-Catholic feeling was considered to be a central tenet of English national identity. Developing out of an atmosphere of bitter religious divisions in the sixteenth century, anti-Catholicism (broadly defined as fear of, and hostility towards, the Catholic Church and its adherents) reached its zenith as a cultural force in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even as the era of the Gordon Riots gave way to a more enlightened age symbolised by the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Acts of 1778, 1781 and 1829, old prejudices continued to resurface. Indeed, Mary Hickman has suggested that anti-Catholicism “remained the sentiment which most clearly defined the nation” well after 1829. The principal reasons for its continued longevity during the Victorian period are well-known. These included the infusing of strands of evangelical thought with anti-Catholicism; the growing influence of Tractarianism and, later, Ritualism, within the Church of England; the rise of nonconformity with an evangelical anti-Catholic worldview; and the visible resurgence of the Roman Catholic religion greatly influenced by ultramontane priests and large numbers of Irish

1 John Wolffe has dated the centrality of anti-Catholicism to British national identity until as recently as Pope John Paul II’s visit to Britain in 1982. See John Wolffe, ‘Change and Continuity in British Anti-Catholicism, 1829-1982’, Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789, ed. by Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), p. 68.
3 Wolffe, ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 68.
immigrants. Whatever the reasons for its prevalence, Victorian anti-Catholicism was more than simply a theological standpoint against the Church of Rome. Its many different and often disparate strands, whether political, social, economic or cultural, helped to define national identity not only in England but also in the rest of the British Isles and the Anglophone world generally.

It is perhaps only from a regional, rather than national or even transnational, perspective where it is possible to observe the way in which anti-Catholicism influenced, and was influenced by, specific cultural contexts. The purpose of this book, therefore, is to examine anti-Catholicism in a relatively neglected but potentially fruitful regional area (the North East of England) during a specifically heightened period of

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anti-Catholic tension (1845-1870).\(^7\) The little research carried out on this subject in this region suggests that this area was largely immune from the all-encompassing anti-Catholicism evident in other areas of the country. This theory was first posited by Roger Cooter in 1973 for a dissertation on the subject of Irish immigration in Newcastle and County Durham which has recently been published, unchanged, in book form.\(^8\) Cooter's research is based around a theory that, for a variety of political, economic, social and cultural reasons, anti-Irishness and anti-Catholicism were “notable by their absence” in the North East. A combination of a dominant Liberal and Dissenter culture, a well-established and strong Catholic community, a favourable economic situation and the North East’s isolation from events in London, ensured that “anti-Catholicism was confined to a very small minority of devoted upholders of the Establishment”.\(^9\) His findings are crucial for those who wish to posit the theory of a North East “exceptionalism”, one in which the region’s identity is based upon isolation from certain cultural trends evident elsewhere in the country, most notably a uniquely welcoming attitude towards “outsiders”. The question of this identity has become a hotly contested issue but Cooter’s theories on the absence of a local anti-Catholic culture, even after nearly 40 years of historical scholarship, largely remain, if not unquestioned, then certainly broadly accepted.\(^10\)

There are, however, several problems with Cooter’s hypothesis which this book seeks to address. Firstly, it is well known that many areas in the North East of England were strongholds of Nonconformity and the North East generally was the very “citadel of Liberalism”.\(^11\) However, these generalisations hide disparities between different areas with the relative importance of various religious groups differing from setting to setting.

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\(^7\) Limitations of space have prevented this book from including the rest of Northumberland within its area of study. These years (1845-70) are widely accepted by historians as the most fruitful for a study of anti-Catholicism owing to a variety of political and cultural reasons which will be addressed in this book.


\(^9\) Cooter, Paddy, p. 102.


Durham was an Anglican and (almost by definition) Conservative stronghold, Presbyterianism was influential in South Shields, Darlington was effectively run by a Quaker elite, and in Newcastle, “it was the Quakers, Baptists, and Independents who mattered” politically.\textsuperscript{12} The situation outside the major towns was different still where, in many (although not all) of the Durham pit villages, Primitive Methodism appealed to the predominantly working class population.\textsuperscript{13} Anti-Catholicism was also far from the exclusive domain of Conservative and Anglican interests. Liberals and Dissenters, particularly the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists that dominated most of the North East, could be as anti-Catholic as their Anglican and Tory adversaries if the issue suited them.\textsuperscript{14} Dissenting support for these campaigns was often not directly anti-Catholic but their reasons for doing could be coloured by anti-Catholic arguments. Furthermore, interdenominational co-operation between Dissenters and Anglican Evangelicals was a common occurrence in the North East, particularly when confronting the Papal threat.\textsuperscript{15}

Secondly, while there was certainly a long-established tradition of Catholicism in the North East\textsuperscript{16}, Catholic communities did not, in themselves, dampen the anti-Catholic mood. There can be no doubt that these communities experienced an unprecedented expansion during the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, the total Catholic population in Newcastle and County Durham increased from 23,250 in 1847 to 86,397 in 1874.\textsuperscript{17} The number of places of worship also expanded significantly, funded


\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion on the role of Primitive Methodism which draws heavily on sources from County Durham, see Robert Colls, \textit{The collier's rant: song and culture in the industrial village} (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

\textsuperscript{14} For the role of Dissenters in anti-Catholicism, see Paz, \textit{Popular Anti-Catholicism}, chapter 6.


\textsuperscript{16} For a general introduction to the Catholic Church in the North East that combines many local parish histories see Michael Morris and Leo Gooch, \textit{Down Your Aisles: The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle} (Hartlepool: Northern Cross, 2000).

\textsuperscript{17} Cooter, \textit{Paddy}, p. 49.
primarily by voluntary subscriptions from the laity.\textsuperscript{18} This increase in Catholic numbers had initially overwhelmed the clergy. At Gateshead, the only priest available ministered, with one derelict warehouse, to 3,000 Catholics in 1851.\textsuperscript{19} Between 1846 and 1876, however, there was a 76% increase in church buildings in the same area, with 56 churches, chapels and missions established by the latter date.\textsuperscript{20} These communities, large and growing in confidence, could just as easily act as a catalyst for religious controversy rather than moderate anti-Catholic feeling.\textsuperscript{21} This was certainly true historically. The continuation of the Catholic faith by gentry families during the recusant period had, in turn, generated a long and parallel tradition of anti-Catholicism which included frenzied attacks on Mass houses during the 1745 Jacobite Rising; a large, very active, and nationally renowned Newcastle Protestant Association agitating during the passing of the Catholic Relief Act of 1788; and a pamphlet war during the debates on the Catholic Relief Bill in the 1820s involving some of the country’s leading anti-Catholic zealots that was unparalleled anywhere else in the country.\textsuperscript{22}

The increase in Catholic numbers and places of worship in the North East was “almost wholly attributable to the Irish” as English Catholics accounted for less than 5% of the Catholic population in the region.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, there is no doubt that the region proved to be an attractive destination for Irish immigrants during this period. The Irish were generally attracted to the burgeoning industries of the region, which

\textsuperscript{18} Morris and Gooch, \textit{Down Your Aisles}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{20} Cooter, \textit{Paddy}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{21} Paz, \textit{Popular Anti-Catholicism}, chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{23} Cooter, \textit{Paddy}, pp. 45.
included, among others, shipbuilding on Tyneside, coal mining in the Durham pit villages and the ironstone industries of the Cleveland Hills.\textsuperscript{24} The total number of Irish-born in County Durham and Newcastle rose from 8,264 in 1841 to 44,419 in 1871. Most of the major districts in the region experienced a huge influx of immigrants during this period with the large Catholic communities in a number of the smaller towns and villages such as Crook, Jarrow and Blackhill, almost wholly attributable to Irish immigrants.\textsuperscript{25} In the larger towns, such as Newcastle and Sunderland, Irish immigrants joined the already long-established Catholic communities. Nevertheless, the reception of these immigrant communities by the English and Protestant host population has been a matter of some debate among historians and, in particular, the long-held assertion that English-Irish relations in North East England were relatively harmonious has been criticised in recent years. This is particularly evident in the work of Frank Neal, whose pioneering research on English-Irish violence in the North East region can be viewed as a direct response to Cooter (and has been hugely influential in setting down preliminary markers for this study).\textsuperscript{26}

Finally, although there were definite similarities in the religious, political, and ethnic composition of many areas of the North East, it would be dangerous to make generalisations about a “regional culture” as a


\textsuperscript{25} J.M. Tweedy, \textit{Popish Elvet: The History of St. Cuthbert’s, Durham: Part II} (Durham: [St. Cuthbert’s Church], 1984), pp. 4-5.

\textsuperscript{26} Studies of the Irish in North East England have tended to fall within two camps. Those who agree with Cooter’s findings, such as S. Doherty, \textit{English and Irish Catholics in Northumberland, 1745-1860} (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen’s University, Belfast, 1987); MacRaild, \textit{Faith, Fraternity and Fighting}; and Joan Allen, ‘“High Days and Holy Days”: St. Patrick’s Day in the North East of England, c.1850-1900’, \textit{Faith of our Fathers: Popular Culture and Belief in Post Reformation England, Ireland and Wales}, ed. by Joan Allen and Richard C. Allen (Newcastle, 2009), and those studies which, to varying degrees have questioned this harmonious relationship: Frank Neal, \textit{English-Irish Conflict in the North East of England} (Salford: University of Salford Press, 1992); D.M. Jackson, ‘“Garibaldi or the Pope!”: Newcastle’s Irish Riot, 1866’, \textit{North East History}, 35 (2001), pp. 49-76.
whole. Indeed, the assumption that the “North East” is a monolithic area representing a unique and coherent identity is open to question. In commenting on the elusiveness of regional identity, Green and Pollard have argued that:

“Finding regional identity in the past, in any region in England, is problematic. The region is elusive and it is protean. Whichever way we choose to look at it, it is unlikely to be all inclusive, all embracing or continuous. We have multiple social identities and look different ways, deal with different agencies and move in different directions according to the different aspects of our lives”.27

This is particularly the case in the North East where, Purdue has argued, the region has been “endowed with a somewhat spurious and certainly unhistorical, precision, character and unity”.28 As will be shown in this book, different forms of anti-Catholicism, which were often the result of local peculiarities, existed in different areas even within Tyneside and in County Durham so a regional anti-Catholic culture cannot be viewed as either coherent or consistent. Furthermore, the North East generally may have felt isolated from events in London but it did not necessarily follow that it was immune from the anti-Catholic strands of thought evident elsewhere, nor was it slow in responding to national anti-Catholic political campaigns.

Clearly, therefore, the cultural conditions necessary for the development of anti-Catholicism were as evident in the North East as other places noted for their virulent anti-Catholic cultures. There was, however, no uniform “North East” anti-Catholicism. Indeed, it is the intention of this book to show the variety of ways in which anti-Catholicism influenced, and was influenced by, the political, social and cultural climate inherent in different parts of Tyneside and the county of Durham. Expanding in particular on the theories of Denis Paz in adopting a broader perspective of viewing different expressions of anti-Catholicism, rather than purely a manifestation of one specific form of anti-Catholicism (such as anti-Irishness) it will highlight not only the strength of certain forms, but also the way in which this ideology could be moulded and manipulated in different areas even

within regions. It will therefore not posit a theory of a “regional anti-Catholic culture”, but instead suggest the existence of a variety of different anti-Catholic “cultures” within the area of study. It will also argue that the context of the “North East” did not, as has previously been suggested, act as a bar to anti-Catholic expression, but, on the contrary, may even have assisted in the developments of certain forms of it. Finally, it will highlight the proactive role of the local Catholic community in sectarian controversy. Catholics did not remain passive in the face of anti-Catholic extremism. Indeed, the strength and conduct of the local Catholic community in defence of their religion may have actively assisted in the development of local anti-Catholic cultures.

In order to try to show this, the study will take a thematic approach, examining the ideological, political, cultural and social aspects of anti-Catholicism. Chapter One will concentrate on the ideology of popular anti-Catholicism in the North East of England in order to highlight the various strands of thought which provided the backdrop to the events examined in subsequent chapters. It will demonstrate the way in which these different strands did not represent a single unifying ideology but were often contested and moulded by peculiarly Victorian concerns. Indeed, these strands were as prevalent in the North East of England as they were elsewhere.

The next three chapters will examine anti-Catholicism’s political dimension and the local response to the different politico-religious events of the period that drew upon different aspects of anti-Catholic ideology. Chapter Two will examine the local response to the biggest anti-Catholic political event of the period: the Restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850. It will suggest that the hysteria generated by this event occurred because it enabled a broad range of all political and religious groups to unite, however briefly, in a common hatred of the Papal measure. In the North East, not only were town meetings and petitions initiated just as readily as other areas of the country but were, in certain areas, also just as likely to be directed against those Anglicans who had adopted the “Popish” practices of Tractarianism. Chapter Three will concentrate on the local response to political events which played on “Conservative” and/or Anglican interpretations of the “Protestant Constitution”, such as the parliamentary “concessions” granted to Catholics in the form of the Maynooth Grant and Irish disestablishment, as well as a raft of changes designed to relax the laws on Catholics generally. Given the Liberal/Dissenter dominance of much of the North East, it would be expected that this aspect of anti-Catholic ideology would hold little sway. However, this chapter will show that, although there were clear
weaknesses, many places responded just as vehemently as other areas of the country. Chapter Four will examine the local response to political events which played on Liberal notions of anti-Catholicism. Events such as the campaign for Italian independence, with its charismatic leader Giuseppe Garibaldi, as well as the campaigns for the inspection of convents and the release of the Madai, infused the “Liberal” ideologies of internationalism and religious liberty with a specifically anti-Catholic outlook. The Liberal slant on anti-Catholicism may have appeared less bigoted than its Conservative equivalent, but its arguments were just as likely to infuriate the Catholic community. Indeed, not only will this chapter highlight the popularity of Liberal anti-Catholicism in certain parts of the North East, but will also show the way in which the strength of the local Catholic communities could be just as militant in combating these attacks on their religion, most notably in defence of their spiritual leader, the Pope.

Anti-Catholicism was more than just apparent in the response to political events, particularly when the Catholic threat appeared to be closer to home. Chapter Five will, therefore, investigate the Protestant reaction to the growth of the Catholic community in the North East of England. Generally speaking, the outward signs of “Popery”, such as the building of churches and public processions, with a few notable exceptions, passed off with little comment, so long as their activities did not directly affect the Protestant community. The real battleground, however, was fought over the souls of Catholics. Indeed, local Protestant evangelicals of all persuasions saw the influx of Irish Catholics into the industrialised towns and cities of the North East as an opportunity for proselytism. The situation was further exacerbated by the strength of the local Catholic community, who ironically assisted in the development of this anti-Catholic culture by their defence against the Protestant proselytisers. Finally, Chapter Six will turn its attention to religious violence in the North East of England. This region was not immune from the sectarian violence which was the product of large scale Irish immigration. Indeed, this chapter will suggest that there were different forms of religious violence associated with the Irish that were clearly linked to anti-Catholicism and dependent not only on the cultural context of the local area but also the period in which it occurred. For Irish Catholics, violence could be either an expression of a defence of their religion against anti-Catholicism, as victims of the anti-Catholicism of the English working class, or as ritualised theatre against their Irish Protestant countrymen.
CHAPTER ONE

THE IDEOLOGY OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND

“The great mass of the middle class of the people of England are too much taken up with affairs of trade to examine ‘vice versa’ the great principles of Catholicity; books they seldom trouble, the daily and provincial newspapers form their political and controversial Bible, thousands upon thousands believe as Gospel truth whatever they read in the newspapers they are accustomed to peruse . . . Some time ago the papers in England kept the pulpits at bay, and restrained the bigots from their occupation, but now both pulpit and press are united in the assault on the church of Christ”.1

Anti-Catholicism, as a set of ideas and beliefs, represents one of the most consistent and dominant ideologies in the history of post-Reformation Britain. Anti-Catholic ideology remained a prominent feature of Protestant thought well into the nineteenth century2 and the sustained sectarian tension of the mid-Victorian period in particular brought forth an explosion of popular anti-Catholic opinion throughout the Anglophone world. Combining traditional theological polemic with key elements of Victorian philosophy, anti-Catholicism defined what it meant to be Protestant and British. It was, as David Hempton suggests, “probably the most ubiquitous, most eclectic and most adaptable ideology in the post-Reformation history of the British Isles”.3 While it is possible to unpick the various doctrinal aspects of anti-Catholic thought, the range of studies which have examined anti-Catholicism from varying standpoints is testament to the view that there can be no single unifying theory which can wholly explain the continuing prevalence of these ideas and beliefs among

1 From the Northumberland and Durham correspondent of the Tablet, 2 October 1852.
the Victorian population. These studies include Victorian anti-Catholic ideology as an essentially reactionary phenomenon (Best, Norman); or as a form of prejudice (Wallis, Sidenvall); or through psychological interpretations of Protestant identity and the Catholic 'Other' in Victorian art and literature (Wheeler, Griffin). This opening chapter will examine the key elements of this ideology within these varying frameworks to argue that the North East shared many of the major tenets of anti-Catholic ideology evident in other parts of the country. It will determine to what extent its tenets represented a continuation of traditional anti-Catholic ideas and how far these ideas were moulded by specific Victorian concerns.

So what were the major tenets of anti-Catholic ideology and to what extent were they evident in the North East of England? At its most basic level, the broad tenets of mid-Victorian anti-Catholic thought can be viewed as simply a continuation of the polemical conflicts of the Reformation era, albeit coloured by a specific Victorian worldview, in which dogmatism and misrepresentation were the defining characteristics of debates. This is evident in the most fundamental of all disagreements between Protestants and Catholics: the rule of faith. Both creeds agreed that faith stemmed ultimately from God, but that this was transmitted in different ways. For Protestants of all persuasions, the Scriptures were the ultimate authority. In the North East of England, the authority of the Bible was a particularly important issue because it enabled the wide range of Protestant denominations that existed throughout the region to unite under a shared "Protestant" heritage and outlook. In a local tract celebrating the power of the Holy Scriptures, the Methodist minister, the Rev. William Cooke, argued that the Bible was the only infallible guide. “It is”, he added, “the instrument God employs to enlighten, to save, and to bless our benighted and ruled world”.

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the extremist anti-Catholic Evangelical organisation, the Protestant Reformation Society, the eminent eschatologist, the Rev. Dr. John Cumming, concurred with this view that the Bible and Protestantism were inextricably linked. It was a belief, he argued, “that they could not let go without lifting the very anchors of their faith and being drifted upon a boat without compass or star and without Him to guide them”.7 In 1866, the Durham Evangelical, the Rev. George Fox, preached on what he saw as the crucial difference in the Protestant and Catholic perception of the Word of God. While the Bible was central to the transmission of faith for Protestants, the Church of Rome was not only an “unscriptural” Church but had an “unceasing enmity to God’s Word”, denying its followers personal access to the Bible because it was believed to be potentially subversive:

“Under the pretext that the people cannot understand it, and are apt to pervert it, she has robbed mankind of her noblest birthright—an open Bible. According to her law, no one may read the Bible without priestly permission; and she hath declared that ‘more harm than good comes of it’”.8

This was certainly an exaggeration in Britain where an English Roman Catholic translation of the Bible had been available since the sixteenth century. From the Roman Catholic perspective, though, allowing the individual the right to interpret the Bible without the guidance of the Church was not a part of its teachings. Indeed, in a popular lecture in Sunderland on the subject of ‘Church Authority and the Bible’ in October 1851, the Catholic priest of the town, the Rev. Philip Kearney, argued that “to give up the Bible to the interpretation of each individual is the most effectual plan to propagate infidelity”.9 Kearney argued that the Bible only “becomes life to those who seek it” through the interpretation of the Church, arguing that it was read by only a comparatively few people until the advent of the printing press and “if Christ wished the salvation of all through the means of the Bible only, he would surely have adopted a system which would necessarily include the masses” before this period.10

7 Hartlepool Free Press, 2 June 1866.
10 Sunderland Herald, 31 October 1851.
While the Protestant claims to the authority of the Scriptures were vulnerable in an age of criticism, the Roman Catholic rule of faith was “based upon the Petrine rock of the Church of Rome” which interpreted faith and doctrine through both the Bible and the concept of tradition, i.e. that faith is prominent in those teachings of Christ not committed to writing at the time. To Protestants, particularly Liberals, this emphasis on tradition was “unscientific” and at odds with the empiricism of the Victorian period. It was, as the Rev. George Fox stated in a further sermon, essentially “sayings handed down by word of mouth from father to son and from age to age”. The central role played by tradition in the Catholic Church was vehemently attacked by the Anglican minister who saw it as “absurd . . . to attach the least weight to the correctness, or truth, of such flooding irresponsible statements, which may have survived the wreck of ages, and the thick of medieval darkness”. Fox believed that as a result of this emphasis on tradition, the Church of Rome had been able to introduce a number of “superstitious” beliefs into the Catholic mind. He argued that the practice of idolatry, in the form of worshipping saints and images, was not only unscriptural but also explicitly forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Fox was clearly irritated by this practice:

“Nothing can be more disgusting than to walk through the churches and cathedrals on the Continent, and see crowds of deluded persons, bowing down before and worshipping the images of dead men and women, who can no more hear what they say, than the idols of the heathens. This is the crowning iniquity of Rome”.13

The Newcastle Journal, an Anglican High Church paper with a notable anti-Catholic stance, appeared to share the Durham clergyman’s view. It regularly printed articles from abroad purporting to be examples of the “gross superstitious practices” of Roman Catholics. An 1846 article entitled “Popish Superstitions” detailed the alleged miracles that occurred after the Chevalier Stewart’s body was temporarily placed in a coffin in the Church of Santa Maria in Italy: The story led the paper to conclude: “This is popery in the nineteenth century. What was it in the twelfth? The same”.14

12 G.T. Fox, The Bible the Sole Rule of Faith: A Sermon Preached in St. Hilda’s Church, South Shields on Sunday Morning, December 8th 1850 (Durham: Andrews, 1850).
13 Fox, Doctrines, pp. 181-82.
14 Newcastle Journal, 12 September 1846.
For anti-Catholics, the most blasphemous element of this idol worshiping was in the Roman Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary. Catholics saw Mary as a “universal mother” who sympathised with human suffering; only the Pope commanded more obedience. In contrast, Protestants believed that Marian devotion was sacrilegious. At a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in Newcastle in June 1847, the chairman of the organisation, Sir Culling E. Eardley, caused controversy when he suggested that an alternative version of the Lord’s Prayer, with the substitution of “Our Father” with “Our Mother”, was being widely circulated on the continent. This caused an angry response from Matthias Dunn, a local and respected Newcastle Catholic, who entered into a correspondence with Sir Culling to vehemently deny the claim. The Newcastle Journal subsequently assisted in the publication of a tract on the dispute, the title of which is indicative of the particular viewpoint that the local paper favoured. The Newcastle paper was again at the forefront of criticism when Pope Pius IX, published an Encyclical on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1849 (a dogma he formally defined in 1854). In commenting on a passage from the Encyclical, the paper described it as “remarkable for its blasphemous substitution of the Virgin Mary in the place of that of Christ”. Marian devotion continued to incense anti-Catholics as it grew in popularity from mid-century, as is evident in this extract from an 1866 sermon by Fox:

“The language which she (Church of Rome) makes her votaries address to the Virgin Mary is blasphemous in our ears. There is hardly an attribute belonging to the Deity that she does not ascribe to Mary. There is no solemn worship, no adoration, no penitent confession, no cry for help, which man can offer up to God, that she does not present to Mary”.

The claims of the Roman Catholic Church to be an “infallible” Church were also criticised by Protestant polemicists. The Protestant critique of Catholic infallibility was once again due to the locus of the latter being undefined and uncertain. This was a concept that again transcended the

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17 *Newcastle Journal, Blasphemy, Idolatry and Superstition of the Roman Catholic Church* (Newcastle: Bell, 1847).
19 Fox, ‘Doctrines’, p. 182.
The Ideology of Anti-Catholicism in North East England

denominational divide in the North East. According to the High Church Anglican minister and Vicar of Newcastle, the Rev. Richard Charles Coxe, in the second of a series of popular lectures on various church subjects, the concept of infallibility had serious implications for the nature of truth because “as truth is one and the same at all times, she must be altered and unalterable”. In another lecture on the subject, the Congregationalist, the Rev. Samuel Goddall, suggested that the power of infallibility had been decided by the Pope who, he argued, was “no more the successor of St Peter than the Queen of England was the successor of Alexander the Great or the Khan of Turkey”. The Darlington Anglican clergyman, the Rev. Howell Harries, published a sermon arguing that there was no evidence in the Bible to support this contention. For Catholics, however, the infallibility of their Church was bestowed as part of God's creation. In a defence of the doctrine of infallibility during a sold-out lecture at South Shields, the Irish Catholic priest, the Rev. Dr. Daniel Cahill, argued that God had created “unchangeable physical laws” in relation to the “government of the body”. It therefore followed that he must have made “infallible laws for the government of the soul”.

For Protestants, the infallible authority of the Catholic Church was epitomised in the sinister figure of the priest who appeared to hold a distinct “apartness” from the bulk of the Catholic laity. The priesthood was particularly abhorrent to Protestants because it reacted against a strong English tradition of the equal relationship between clergy and laity. This “apartness” was maintained by a tremendously powerful psychological hold. Delivering a lecture on infallibility and the priesthood during a tour of the North East in 1852, the renowned Manchester Evangelical lecturer, the Rev. Hugh Stowell, who was also Canon of Chester Cathedral, argued that priestly power was reinforced through a number of different mediums. Firstly, this can be observed in the alleged retention of the Bible.

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21 R.C. Coxe, Thoughts on Important Church Subjects, Seven Lectures (Newcastle: St. Nicholas, 1851), p. 49.
22 Durham Chronicle, 9 December 1864.
As it was only ignorance that enabled priestly power to maintain its influence, the Bible—an essential key to knowledge—was kept from the laity and retained by the priest. This enabled him to hold a monopoly over religious knowledge, upon which his congregation became entirely dependent. Secondly, the confession allowed the priest to create a culture of dependency through luring his “subjects” into divulging their greatest secrets and taking them into his confidence. Stowell described this system as one that “could have only been the device of the devil to enable the priests to enslave the people”. Thirdly, absolution of sins, the result of confession, exalted the priest “above the Saviour of Mankind” by the power to forgive sins. Finally, Stowell argued, the priest was able not only to “enslave the body, but (also) the conscience of man” through making him believe that they can “haunt him in the unseen and dark shades of purgatory”, of which he could only be saved once the “money was heard to tinkle in the box” through the sale of indulgences.27

It was the celebration of Mass that particularly caught the attention of anti-Catholics.28 A pamphlet by the Anglican minister, the Rev. Robert Taylor of Hartlepool, simply entitled ‘The Mass’, described it as a “pantomimic representation of all Christ’s labouring and sufferings from the commencement of the Last Supper to his death upon the cross, and his ascension into Heaven”.29 Similarly, in a popular lecture on ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass’, the Rev. John Sheills alleged to a Newcastle audience that the Mass effectively “invalidated the great sacrifice that Christ made, once for all, upon the cross”.30 Above all, it was the doctrine of transubstantiation and the notion that Christ is corporeally present in the Eucharist which particularly horrified many Protestants. The Rev. Samuel Dunn, in a tract entitled “An Exposure of the Mummeries, Absurdities and Idolatries of Popery”, saw the consumption of the Body of Christ as cannibalism because the Catholics believed that the disciples ate the body of Jesus, including the “blood, bones, sinews etc.” Given this absurdity, Dunn argued, “should a mouse devour a consecrated wafer, it would really eat the body of Christ”.31 The Rev. Mr. Taylor went further in suggesting that the circular shape of the wafer presented to the communicant was, in fact, an old pagan symbol representing “Satan’s cypher (sic)”.32

27 Newcastle Courant, 5 March 1852.  
28 Wallis, Popular Anti-Catholicism, p. 23.  
29 Extract quoted in Newcastle Journal, 18 September 1847.  
30 Durham Advertiser, 5 December 1862.  
32 Newcastle Journal, 18 September 1847.
Catholics, though, transubstantiation was a doctrine that was closely linked with their individual and communal Catholic identity. In a lecture in Sunderland in December 1851, the Rev. Mr. Kearney acknowledged that the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist was a mystery calculated to defy understanding, but he countered the Church's critics by arguing: “was not the Trinity a mystery? The Incarnation a mystery? — a God in a manger! A God under the carpenter’s roof! A God mocked by the Jews, and dying on Cavalry!”

The ideology of anti-sacerdotalism (hatred of priests) was also linked to a further popular topic in the anti-Catholic imagination: the role of the nun and the convent. An examination of the appeal sent to the local press during the anti-convent campaigns of the 1850s reveals that this tenet of anti-Catholic thought worked on a number of different levels. To begin with, there was a genuine fear that nuns were physically imprisoned in convents against their own will. “If the inhabitants remain there willingly”, cried the appeal, “why are they shut in with high walls and iron bars”. Certainly there was a belief that the convents themselves gave the physical appearance of a prison or “dungeons which the light of day cannot penetrate”. This reference to the convents as dungeons implies a torture chamber analogy, linked in the idea of the Inquisition and persecution, which were allegedly staples of Roman Catholic justice. The nuns were not merely trapped physically, but also psychologically. It was believed that females were “allured” into nunneries under a trance-like “dream of blessedness”, only to discover too late the “fearful reality of desolation”. Convents also played on Victorian obsessions with the patriarchal family model. In particular, it has been argued that convents represented a real threat to the Protestant ideal of womanhood which was reflected in the attempted replication of the family model in the convent. The Appeal therefore, was directed towards mothers and their inability to protect their daughters once they were “allured” into these nunneries—“How can she (the mother) bear to think that the voice which once gladdened her fireside may cry for help, where the only reply shall be the echo of the dismal vault”. Behind this, lies the popular Jesuitical anti-Catholic stereotype of the Roman Catholic system working its way secretly into the very heart of the Victorian family—“Rome’s emissaries . . . may be acting unseen in the

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33 Sunderland Herald, 12 December 1851.
most happy families, to convert them into scenes of weeping and disorder.35

The sexual mores of priests and nuns were favourite topics of the more vulgar aspects of popular anti-Catholicism. As D. Peschier has argued, convents “were regarded as the locus for all kinds of perversions, sexual perversions in particular”.36 Celibacy and chastity were particularly repugnant to anti-Catholics who believed them to have immoral consequences.37 From the 1830s, stories of sexual misdemeanour in “confessional and convent” sprang up in response to a growing market for such works. Ingram suggests that the longevity of the convent question and the recurring popularity of priests and nuns in pornographic print lay in the fact that “Protestant society from top to bottom . . . was deeply harassed by the idea of the Catholic priest as a sexual threat to all women”.38 These ideas were no better expressed than in The Confessional Unmasked, a tract that formed the basis of the lectures of No Popery demagogues such as Patrick Flynn and William Murphy, who both toured the North East in the late 1860s.39 The Confessional Unmasked was allegedly based on a manual for Catholic priests on how to deal with taboo subjects in the confessional and is symptomatic of the Protestant obsession with priestly sexuality. The priest is required to interrogate his penitent who he feels may have committed the sin of adultery as this extract shows:

“If the penitent be a girl, let her be asked—Has she ornamented herself in dress so as to please the male sex?, or for the same end, has she painted herself; or bared her arms, her shoulders, or her bosom?”40

39 Wolffe, Protestant Crusade, p. 124.
40 [B.C.], The Confessional Unmasked Showing the Depravity of the Priesthood, Questions Put to Females in Confession, Perjury and Stealing Commanded and Encouraged etc. Being Extracts from the Theological Works of Saint Alphonso M. De. Liguori, Peter Dens, Bailly, Delahogue, and Cabassutius (London: Johnston, 1851), p. 40.
The quote above is mild in comparison to the second half of the tract, which deals with subjects such as *coitus interruptus*, masturbation, ejaculation and impotence and the various scenarios in which they can be categorised as a sin are discussed in lurid detail. This obsession with the sexual activity of his penitents was derived from the priest’s forced vow of celibacy, which was not only “unnatural” but could lead to the priest becoming a “super-virile seducer and rapist”.41

Anti-Catholicism was more than just prurient pornography or theological polemic to the Victorian Protestant. K. Kumar has suggested that anti-Catholicism survived into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries primarily because of its political and cultural associations.42 Certainly in the Victorian period, Protestantism and anti-Catholicism were fundamental facets of English national identity as Britain’s industrial greatness became inextricably linked to her religion. According to Denis Paz, this perception was closely connected to the idea of Providentialism—Britain had been chosen to carry out God’s will. In return, for its evangelical work, it enjoyed superior political and economic status.43 This idea of Providentialism certainly influenced the views of the Scottish anti-Catholic journal, the *Bulwark*:

“To her religion, under God’s blessing, Britain is principally indebted. But God never works without a purpose, and He would not have given her so much power and influence had she no mission to accomplish. Like the Jews of old, Britain has been chosen as a repository of God’s word. She is almost the only light in the midst of surrounding darkness”.44

The link between British nationalism and Protestantism was also evident at the local level. The editor of the *Newcastle Journal* saw his native country as “the parent of modern industry, enterprise, improved arts . . . and in one word-civilisation”, of which her religion played a crucial role.45 According to the Rev. T. Pottinger, in a local sermon entitled ‘The Bible is the Glory of Our Land’, the source of Britain’s greatness was in her morality and religious devotion, developed through reading and following the Word of God:

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41 Ingram, ‘Protestant Patriarchy’, p. 790.
43 Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism*, p. 3.
44 *Bulwark*, 1 December 1859, p. 148.
45 *Newcastle Journal*, 18 October 1850.
“In proportion as the people of this country love and revere the Bible they reap the benefits of a moral and religious training . . . secular education may make men scholars, citizens, merchants, senators, but it overlooks the Christian which is the highest state of man. The Bible claims authority to stamp its own beautiful image upon the education of all classes amongst us . . . Such a training would be the best guarantee for peace, order, liberty, justice, good-will, and national prosperity”.46

The effects of a return to Popery would, it was believed, be disastrous for the country as a whole. For many who shared these views, it was not merely a matter of opinion. This could be “proved” both geographically and historically. Of the former, they only needed to look to the Catholic countries of Europe to see the material effects of the “Popish” religion.47 The usually tolerant Newcastle alderman, Sir John Fife, saw no contradiction in his attitude when he spoke at the Newcastle meeting for the liberation of the Protestant Madiai family in Tuscany (see Chapter Four). The working man in Roman Catholic countries", he argued, “was badly fed, badly clothed, badly lodged, broken in spirit and degraded by the habit of kneeling to his fellow-men (hear, hear) and transplanted to the earth by the cloven foot of tyranny”.48 The people of Catholic countries, it was believed, lived in a climate of fear and oppression that was symptomatic of their religion. “Religious and Civil Liberty” may have been a rather overworked phrase in the nineteenth century49, but for many it was undeniably the main benchmark that divided Protestant and Catholic countries. Thus, the Italian evangelist lecturer Alessandro Gavazzi, in his popular lectures in the North East, argued that his native country had “neither liberty of thought, liberty of action, liberty of meeting, nor liberty

46 T. Pottinger, The Bible is the Glory of Our Land: The Substance of a Sermon Delivered in Tuhill Stairs Chapel, Newcastle, on November 15th 1849 (Newcastle: [n. pub.] 1849).
48 Newcastle Guardian, 19 March 1853.
of conversation”.50 The Rev. J.A. Wylie concurred with this viewpoint in a lecture to the Protestant Alliance. Indeed, Wylie believed there was “far more toleration of the Christians in Pagan times than was in the case in Papal Rome”.51 Ireland was a particularly special case in this respect. Hugh McLeod has suggested that for nineteenth century British Protestants, “the supreme embodiment of the Catholic Other was not France but Ireland”.52 This negative perception was cultivated by a mainland image of the Irish as lagging behind their “Saxon” contemporaries in mental capacity.53 A letter writer to the *Newcastle Journal* suggested that this was reflected in the role of the Irish immigrant in his new society:

“You do not find near Newcastle that Irishmen rise to any station or influence in society, generally they are not proficient in any sort of science, not teachers of music, or drawing, or languages, not employed in superior offices in trade, manufacture, gardening, or engineering . . . the Irishman ends as he began, a day labourer, devoid of skill and knowledge, and even of manual dexterity”.54

The link between the degrading effects of the Catholic religion and the “subhuman” Irish mindset was not always made clear by contemporaries. The contemporary historian and Whig politician, T.B. Macaulay, certainly thought that English and Irish animosity arose from religious, rather than racial differences55 and there were attempts by some local commentators to link Catholicism and Irish degradation with Ireland itself. During the Irish Rebellion of 1848, the Liberal *Durham Chronicle* believed that


51 *Newcastle Journal*, 30 October 1852.


54 *Newcastle Journal*, 14 June 1848.

Ireland’s woes rested in the Catholic priests “who seem to have become rather a curse than a blessing, forgetting alike their duty to God and the responsibility of that sovereignty which they hold over men”. The Liberal *Sunderland News* reflected on the relative tranquillity of Ireland in 1852, believing it to be based on the increase in Protestantism in the country. This, the paper argued, was evident in the “greater energy, self-reliance and independence” to which the Protestant religion “generates wherever it prevails”. The *Newcastle Journal* also grabbed the opportunity to attack the present state of Ireland itself, and agreeing with Admiral Sir Joseph Yorke, that “it would be to the exceeding benefits of society . . . that Ireland should be let into the sea for some 24 hours”. Evangelicals believed that the conversion of Ireland and the Irish Catholics to Protestantism provided the only means of escape from their spiritual and material destitution. Not every commentator concurred with the view that the “misery” of Ireland could be blamed solely on the Catholic religion. Indeed, the Liberal *Gateshead Observer* described this theory as “sheer nonsense”, quoting Belgium as an example of a prosperous Catholic country where “Catholics (lay and clerical) are as rife as Ireland”.

This perception of Catholic countries as harbingers of despotism and the antithesis of liberty was vehemently denied by the Roman Catholics. In a speech during a Roman Catholic festival in Sunderland in 1851, the Rev. Philip Kearney was again active in denying the stereotype of the Catholic poor as “miserable” and “wretched”:

“Don’t believe those who say this. I have been abroad for eleven years and I can tell you that the poor people in other (Catholic) countries are happier and more comfortable than the poor people in England. They are better educated, there are no reasoners among them, no infidels who go on in mathematics till they deny the existence of the supreme being. They are good and simple beings . . .”

The consequences of Popery could also be shown by referring to the course of history. This was a particularly favoured tactic of anti-Catholic lecturers, who employed what Herbert Butterfield was later to term, the

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56 *Durham Chronicle*, 4 February 1848.
57 *Sunderland News*, 18 September 1852.
58 *Newcastle Journal*, 7 June 1851.
60 *Gateshead Observer*, 22 January 1849.
61 *Sunderland Herald*, 28 November 1851.