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St George-in-the-East Riots

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Why did liturgical innovations in this church 150 years ago give rise to such intense passions and conflict? The short answer lies in the extent to which events at St George's became a focal point for much wider tensions in the mid-Victorian Church of England. Nowadays we can still envisage an individual parish hitting the headlines as a result of, say, provocative actions by gay clergy or hardline evangelicals, but in a Church that has learned to live with enormous diversity of styles of worship, it is hard to imagine any liturgical innovation short of a black mass or a ritual orgy giving rise to particular controversy. In 1859, however, congregations still expected consistent and unchanging forms of service, and when changes were introduced they were liable to be perceived as indicative of substantial hidden agendas.

Dominic Janes will be saying more later about the specific suspicions that attached to Bryan King and his colleagues at St George's, but in my presentation I want to set the scene by explaining why in 1859 and 1860 people appeared hypersensitive to changes in the form of worship. In order to begin to do this I need to go back another three decades to 1829, when Parliament passed the Catholic Emancipation Act that gave civil equality to Roman Catholics in all practical matters. At first sight this might seem a landmark on the road to liberal toleration, which in some respects it was, but the Tory government had granted it under duress because of the fear of major political and electoral difficulties in Ireland. In the event the 1830s saw a significant upsurge in anti-Catholic feeling, which had been more subdued since the Gordon Riots convulsed London in 1780. The fear was that as Catholics were no longer excluded from public life by law, they had to be more actively confronted on the ground if the integrity of national Protestantism was to be maintained. Moreover Emancipation coincided with the beginning of a notable period of growth in Roman Catholicism, swelled by immigration from Ireland, even before the Great Famine of the 1840s.

You will note that I emphasize the growth of Roman Catholicism as important context for the emergence of the Anglo-Catholic ritualism that was the immediate provocation for the riots here at St George's. Ironically the Oxford Movement originated in 1833 in a movement to defend the impeccably Protestant Church of Ireland against reform measures put forward by the Whig government, a cause that suggested considerable common ground with their Evangelical critics. Nevertheless, in the later 1830s the

Movement became more obviously Catholic – but not Roman Catholic – in its tendencies, and gave rise to increasing antagonisms. Its adherents were dubbed Puseyites by their opponents, after Professor Edward Pusey, believed to be the main leader of the movement in Oxford. However opposition to the Oxford Movement and the ritualist movement that succeeded it was rooted in the suspicion that they were at best foolishly doing the Pope's work for him, and at worst a Jesuitical fifth column of Roman Catholics pretending to be Anglicans and infiltrating the national church. Such suspicions drew their power from the well-founded observation that the Roman Church itself was substantially strengthening its presence in England.

The second quarter of the nineteenth century saw the formation of a number of organizations with the specific purpose of opposing the growth of Roman Catholicism. First in the field, two years before Catholic Emancipation, was the British Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation, founded in 1827. Its initial purpose was proselytism among Roman Catholics in Ireland, but it soon found that there were quite enough Catholics to keep it fully occupied in England. Following an extensive series of Protestant meetings across the country in 1835, the Protestant Association was formed in 1836, with an emphasis on resistance to any further legislative concessions to Catholics. These two bodies were exclusively Anglican and Presbyterian in practice, but they were followed in 1851 by the interdenominational Protestant Alliance. Numerous other smaller and shorter-lived organizations of this kind were operative in the 1840s and 1850s producing networks that seem to have had a significant role in mobilising wider support for the St George's parishioners who opposed Bryan King's innovations. King wrote to the Home Secretary in November 1859:

I have every reason to believe that these riots are *organized* by two bodies – by the 'Anti-Puseyite League' – a society which seems to have been instituted in this neighbourhood for the express purpose, and by the 'National Protestant Society' – the Secretary of which Mr Edward Harper is in the habit of holding lectures in London, when he exhorts his hearers to join in making their first attack against 'Puseyism' at my Church and the in following up that, but attacking every other similar Church in London in turn.

Harper was in fact a rather disreputable character, whose motivation appears to have been as much mercenary as religious, and who embarrassed more moderate and respectable Protestant leaders, but the agitation of the preceding three decades meant that he had well-cultivated soil in public opinion to work on.

By the 1850s too events were serving to reinforce Protestant fears. Roman Catholic numbers were continuing to grow substantially as a result of Irish immigration, and new and more prominent churches were being built. This trend was very evident here in the East End, where in the 1851 Religious Census, there were 1500 Catholic mass attendances in St George's registration district, and a further 6750 in the nearby registration districts of Whitechapel and Stepney. St George's parishioners in the 1850s would therefore have been well aware of Roman Catholicism as a growing religious presence on the ground. At the same time those who perceived the Oxford Movement

to be romanizing in its tendency felt their suspicions to be confirmed by a number of high profile conversions of Anglican clergy to Rome, above all those of John Henry Newman in 1845, and of Henry Manning, later Archbishop of Westminster, in 1851. Most alarming of all was the so-called 'Papal Aggression' of late 1850, when Pope Pius IX re-established a territorial Roman Catholic episcopal hierarchy for England and Wales. This might seem a necessary and overdue internal reorganization, but it was unfortunately announced in grandiloquent language that gave the impression that the Pope was claiming a right to carve up British territory. In the eyes of opponents, led by the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell:

There is an assumption of power in all the documents which have come from Rome – a pretension to 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, as asserted even in Roman Catholic times.

Russell denounced the Pope's action in the notorious Durham Letter, so-called because it was addressed to the Bishop of Durham, and provocatively published in *The Times* just before Guy Fawkes Day. However the particular significance of the Durham Letter for our purposes lies in an unexpected twist contained in its concluding paragraphs. Having denounced the Pope, Russell then avowed himself 'much more' alarmed by the actions of 'Clergymen of our own church' who 'have been the most forward in leading their flocks "step by step in the very edge of the precipice', through introducing Roman Catholic practice to the Church of England.

'What then,' Russell continued, 'is the danger to be apprehended from a foreign prince of no great power, compared to the danger within the gates from the unworthy sons of the Church of England herself?'

Russell had his own personal and political motives for scapegoating the Anglo-Catholics, but, to attempt a contemporary analogy, it was rather as if a present-day British Prime Minister, responding to provocative actions by a foreign Muslim leader, condemned British sympathisers with Islam. The effect was that attitudes and suspicions that might hitherto have been dismissed as the prejudices of a paranoid minority now seemed to have been endorsed at the highest level of government.

Russell's attack on Anglo-Catholic clergy readily struck a chord in London, where innovations linked to the Oxford Movement had started in the West End in the 1830s with the ministries of William Dodsworth at Christ Church Albany Street and Frederick Oakeley at the Margaret Chapel, now All Saints Margaret Street. By the 1850s both Dodsworth and Oakeley had become Roman Catholics, but a new wave of controversies centred on St Paul's Knightsbridge and St Barnabas Pimlico kept the issues alive for much of the 1850s.

When the disturbances at St George's broke out, the views of George Smith, Chairman of the Anti-Puseyite League, seemed very much to echo those Russell had expressed in the Durham Letter a decade before. He wrote as follows to the Home Secretary:

I ... beg of you to assist in the good work of purging the House of God from the unseemly excrescences that have of late years sprung up within those edifices, remembering Sir that this is a Protestant Country and that the great majority of the laity are Protestants and that the Throne of our Blessed Queen is established on its foundation and the greatest Curse that can happen to Her whom we Love and Honour; as well as to the Nation at large and ourselves the working portion of the laity would be anything like to a return to Popery as no good Protestant will never own any allegiance to the Pope; although from the supineness of some and the interested obstinacy of others appear to denote that to be the Goal to which the country is fast approaching, which I humbly pray may God forbid.

For those who thought like Smith there was much more at stake at St George's than distasteful changes to the style of Sunday worship.

Before I hand over to Dominic, who will say more about what actually happened here 150 years ago, I would like in conclusion to say a few words about why I think it is important to be aware of these events today. More usually of course the anniversaries that get marked are positive ones – the birth or death of some 'great' man or woman; the opening of a church; some great triumph of 'progressive' legislation such as the abolition of the slave trade. The value of this kind of commemoration, however, is that it does prompt more awareness of the actual complexities of religious history. This is a task to which I am personally very committed in currently leading the Building on History project, which is a collaboration between The Open University, Kings College London, the Diocese of London and Lambeth Palace Library. We are seeking to share insights from historical research on nineteenth century religious history with the Church here in London, through seminars, training days, and the development of an online resource guide.

The usual emphasis of our presentations has been on the dynamics of church growth and decline, exploring how better knowledge of the past may be a positive stimulus to action in the present, by marshalling the historical evidence that questions the inevitability of secularization, and looking at examples of church planting in Victorian London. However the story of the St George's riots is also very relevant to our wider purpose in that they are a significant example of the passion and conflict that religious issues could stir at a variety of social levels. They remind us that religious innovations, however acceptable and successful in the long term, are seldom uncontentious in the short term. They are a cautionary tale of the potential for problems in a single parish – given a certain combination of circumstances – to become a focal point for much wider tensions in the church and in society as a whole. Above all, they suggest an important perspective for handling contemporary disputes within and between churches and other religious groups, by showing that the passage of time can make the most intense arguments seem unnecessary. History may do little to help us to avoid conflict, but it can be very instructive in helping us to learn how to manage and resolve it more effectively and creatively.

The Cultural Context of the Riots at St. George in the East, London
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[This text is an edited version of a section of my recent book *Victorian Reformation: The Fight Over Idolatry in the Church of England, 1840-1860* (Oxford: 2009), and is reproduced with the permission of Oxford University Press. Please refer to the book's bibliography to follow up the footnote references given below.]

In the 1840s the Church of England was rocked by the Oxford (or Tractarian) Movement. This was, to put it very generally, an attempt to assert the Catholicity of the Church of England. Its main concerns were theological, but as students from Oxford went out to parochial work, its influence was heavily and vividly felt in the ritual innovations that were made as assertions of this viewpoint. I am here partly because I have recently published a book on this phenomenon, known as ritualism (or, popularly at the time, somewhat misleadingly, as Puseyism), in which I looked in detail at a set of legal cases in London in which such innovations as the use of elaborate vestments, candles on the altar, crosses in church and so forth were challenged.

Bryan King (1811-95), was one of those very Oxford students who had listened to the sermons of Pusey and was drawn to ritualistic conclusions. Shortly after, in the summer of 1842, he was presented to the Rectory of St. George in the East by Brasenose College. Married on September 28th of that year, he was to spend the best part of the next two decades in Stepney. As early as 1844 it was reported to Delane, editor of *The Times*, that he was one of the most strongly Tractarian ministers in London, that his church was badly attended, that he was possessed of an unfortunate 'hauteur' and that he was attempting to force his views on an unwilling populace.¹

King himself had complaints. On his arrival he found that his church was 'blocked up with huge and high boxes [box pews, which had to be paid for], which the poor with their timid delicacy ever shrink from entering'.² It was no wonder there was a small congregation for, in this slum parish, few could afford to buy such seatings. In King's view, the previous rector had been negligent. No one, by contrast, could accuse him of lacking energy. He 'established two mission chapels, five or six schools, affording religious instruction to upwards of 600 children, a penitentiary for the reclaiming of fallen women with whom the neighbourhood abounds, an establishment of ladies actively involved in the evangelisation of the parish, and an energetic system of parochial visitation'.³

Just as was happening across the country, opposition sprang up. As early as 1843 it was noted that 'a large portion of the outcry against Puseyism [nationally] arises from the jealousy of the leading evangelical clergy, the spouters at Exeter Hall (a centre for evangelical debate), [and] the committee-men of certain Societies, who have long been

¹ 'Principal Clergy of London', Bodleian Library Add. Ms. C290, f. 7 r.

² B. King (1860), p. 8.

³ Anon., 'A Layman' (1860), p 5.

accustomed to act in defiance of Church or Bishop'. Other opposition at the time supposedly came from the 'low, calculating utilitarians, the mere nineteenth-century men'. Some Anglicans were suspicious of any change, whilst many others - 'the middle classes, the mercantile and professional, not before having turned their attention to church matters' - were puzzled, hostile and confused. Many of the latter group were wary of the cost implications. One businessman, noting the 'Puseyite' emphasis on the weekly offertory, said "I hope we are not going to have a begging box poked under our noses every Sunday". A lawyer expressed dismay at the thought that the clergy would decide the destination of the funds raised. Further opposition emerged from vestry meetings. The people there, who elected one of the churchwardens, did not have to be Anglicans. Sometimes, they were Dissenters, in cahoots with socialist Chartists, working to disrupt church finances because of their opposition to the church rates. Since Anglican parish churches were supported financially by ratepayers in the parish regardless of their religious profession, those who advocated the use of potentially expensive Catholic ritual forms in the Church of England needed to beware of the financial and doctrinal prejudices of those outside their own denomination.⁴

Opposition was typically focussed upon visible innovations in practices of worship, since these were both crucial indicators of theological tendencies, and also evidence of expenditure and supposed excess. Church ritual was governed by canon law, and there had been a series of high-profile cases which appeared, more or less, to finally support the ritualist, one might say, proto-Anglo-Catholic position. Thus, in 1857, the Privy Council, which was the then final court of appeal in such matters, found that, in essence, the severe 16th century royal announcements against the worship of images (idolatry), did not necessarily apply to incidental objects used in the mass, or for decorations, or images, not directly associated with religious ritual. The Privy Council contended that saints' cults were based on lies but that was not the case with the worship of Christ. Moreover, the cross had been used as an early Christian symbol and employed as an ensign of honour 'without any relation to superstitious or even religious uses'. The royal decrees had only said to remove images that were used for worship, yet the Privy Council argued that greed had led silver objects which were not so employed to be made away with at the Reformation. The decision was that crosses, as opposed to crucifixes, were legal, but only if they were 'architectural ornaments' rather than objects which were in danger of idolatrous employment. It was asserted that as long as it was movable, basically made of wood, rather than of stone, a permanent communion table could be employed (opposition had condemned anything called an altar as being idolatrous). Moreover, vestments, altar clothes and other fabrics should be of decent quality, which essentially meant not too ostentatious, but not too shabby either. King, like many across England, took close heed of this judgement and from this time he used suitable vestments presented by parishioners.

However, as King upped the Catholicity of his services, so opposition in his parish increased dramatically. Just as in many other similar parishes, the incumbent and his curates were arrayed against the elected churchwarden. But, to make things more complex, there was also a lecturer appointed to the parish. The trigger for riot was

⁴ Anon., *Puseyism in London* (1843), pp. 5, 7, 10, 21, 23 and 33 and Chadwick (1971) 1, p. 83.

perhaps set by Tait, the bishop of London, when he licensed Hugh Allen to this post in 1859, a man who was as anti-ritual as was the vestry that had selected him.⁵ Allen was a friend of the barnstorming Baptist Charles Spurgeon, and was 'almost alone amongst the clergy in this district of London for the extravagance of his tenets in the direction of puritanism'.⁶ His invective inflamed the parish and disturbances began on a regular basis. At one point the mob became so threatening that the ritualist Alexander Mackonochie, who was giving a sermon, had to be rescued with the help of five policemen. A group of men were formed to act as a defence force for King. Furthermore, 'a respectable inhabitant of the parish, as respectability is reckoned on Ratcliff Highway [a street notorious for crime], was seized in the act of exciting a small mob of boys and idle ruffians to assault the Rector, and was taken before the magistrate at Thames Police Court.'⁷ There were accusations of stone throwing from both sides.

On August 14th 1859 elements of the crowd seized the choir stalls and cried out that they wanted to attack the choir. King himself refers to all this as sacrilege and wrote uncompromisingly to the bishop about it.⁸ As was commented at the time, 'if there be such a sin as sacrilege, it has certainly been committed at St George's. I refrain from direct allusion to the filthy obscenity of certain acts which have taken place within the very sanctuary of the church'. It was alleged that if such things had happened at St. James', Piccadilly or St. George's, Hanover Square they would never have been allowed to continue. As for the lurid stories in the press, it was alleged that they were written by those ignorant of theology and that the many stories which 'invariably (as some people have observed) contain so many glowing allusions to the "praiseworthy attempts of Mr. Churchwarden Thompson to preserve order," are carefully prepared on Sunday evening in the bar-parlour of that respectable official's public house'.⁹

The riots were, in fact, alleged to be the result of a selfish conspiracy of the mercantile and the ungodly: the passion that provoked them was not Protestantism, but Blackguardism. They were organised by the alien sweaters [ie. owners of sweat shops], who perceived that the gospel of Christ, if practically applied, must tend to emancipate those slaves of labour on whose toil they lived; and by the local brothel keepers, who, like Demetrius the Silversmith, were alarmed for the gains of their occupation. They were fomented by rich men of evil character at the West End of London, who, at least in some notorious instances, combined an ostentatious pietism in public with systematic profligacy in private life [ie. frequented brothels]. The rioters were the very dregs of Wapping.¹⁰

Whatever his intentions, Tait did not calm things down effectively. In a letter sent to the vestry on September 5th 1859 he talked of 'this childish mummery of antiquated

⁵ Crouch (1904), p. 66.

⁶ B. King (1860), p. 14.

⁷ Anon., 'Alpha' (1860), p. 4.

⁸ B. King (1860).

⁹ F. Lee (1860b), pp. 4, 8 and 12.

¹⁰ George W. E. Russell, in Crouch (1904), p. viii and 33.

garments'.¹¹ 'If he had acted with that manliness about which he talked so glibly', King's biographer and son-in-law asserted, then disaster could have been avoided. Tait may not in fact have been trying to stir things up – he subsequently showed support for other ritualist slum missions - but he was certainly accused of it.¹² For instance, an anonymous pamphleteer of the time, 'Alpha', said that there are 'those, and there are many, who maintain that it is the policy of the Home Office to permit these riots, in the hope of suppressing altogether the "Puseyites"'.¹³ King was forced into a leave of absence, having become ill. He went first to rest at Bruges, before moving to Avebury in Wiltshire, where he stayed until 1894, dieing the next year in Weston-super-Mare.

The attitudes which had forced him out were slowly, but inexorably, to decline during the nineteenth century. Thus, during much of the twentieth century the use of many previously controversial elements of ornamentation and liturgical elaboration has come to be accepted. As the church historian, Nigel Yates has commented, 'an Anglican worshipper of 1660 would have noticed few liturgical changes in his parish church if he had returned there in 1840. Sixty years later he would have found it hard to believe that the services in his parish church were those authorized by the Book of Common Prayer'.¹⁴

The widespread projection of intense hatreds and excitements onto objects such as the cross, crucifix and host needs to be seen as the product of specific circumstances. Bryan King wrote in 1879 to his friend J. B. Knight, who was helping to install a mosaic of the crucifixion in St George in the East, saying that 'if I had proposed in my time to have inserted a simple cross in the place of the proposed crucifix, I should have been burned alive.'¹⁵ Whilst clearly we would not want to conjure again the horrors of the battles of the Reformation in which both people and statues were sent to the flames, it is worth thinking about the powerful personal, public and communal significance of church ritual and decoration in the time of Bryan King. The challenge then, and perhaps now, is how to chart a path of respect that avoids the twin dangers of intolerance on the one hand and indifference on the other.

¹¹ Tait, quoted in B. King (1860), p. 12.

¹² Crouch (1904), pp. 88, 112 and 136.

¹³ Anon., 'Alpha' (1860), p. 1.

¹⁴ Yates (2000a), p. 127.

¹⁵ King, quoted in Crouch (1904), p. 166.

The Riots at St George-in-the-East – returning to a broad perspective
The Revd Dr Jeremy Morris, Dean of Trinity Hall Cambridge (and Dean-designate of King's College Cambridge)

Historical events are almost always open to many different complementary interpretations. The riots at St. George's-in-the-East are no exception. Indeed, these were a particularly complex series of events, and it is therefore no surprise that we should find many different ways of reading them. Some of those we have encountered already tonight. It's certainly possible to see them as an expression of popular Protestantism, coupled with intense anxieties around ideas of 'Englishness' or 'Britishness' and even 'manliness'.¹ The ritual and ceremonial innovations of Bryan King could be seen as threatening traditional values, provoking a thoroughly traditional response, namely uproar and mayhem. King himself, and his supporters, naturally considered the riots to be nothing more than the irrational, prejudiced thuggery of a corrupt and desperate mob. But that's presumably not how the rioters themselves saw things: they, instead, saw this as part of a wider struggle against the corruption and idolatry of Rome, which threatened to worm its way even into the English Church. One of the many anonymous, threatening messages King received told him to "Shut up the church...We will never, never rest until St. George's-in-the-East is stripped of all drapery, crosses, candles, choristers, intoning, preaching in the surplice, or any one thing tending to Popery and Puseyism".² Sentiments such as this were of a piece with the virulent anti-Catholicism which still ran through elements of British society in the middle of the nineteenth century. There were parallels here with the 'culture wars' which historians have seen playing themselves out across Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, with different concepts of national identity – Protestant versus Catholic, for example – in conflict.³ Yet the presenting cause, or 'trigger', for the riots was not so much conflicting ideas – though those certainly mattered – as changes in what historians often call 'material culture' – the way ideas are embodied and expressed in very concrete artefacts and practices. And that opens up a rich – and as yet largely unexplored – vein of possibilities about contrasting ideas of the place of art, music, and movement in religious experience.⁴

But I want to press what we've been looking at in two further directions, just to explore what I think are undervalued dimensions of the conflict here in 1859-60. Both of these were raised, interestingly, by Bryan King himself. One was the role of the eucharist in Anglo-Catholic revival, and the other was the Church-State dimension.

There's a common view that the doctrinally innovative dimension of Anglo-Catholic revival had largely fizzled out with Newman's conversion in 1845, and that Ritualism represented, not so much the development or completion of the doctrinal programme of the Tractarians, as a separate and somewhat superficial movement, motivated by counter-cultural impulses.⁵ The Tractarians themselves sometimes gave credence to this view. Pusey, for example, suggested to Bishop Tait that the Ritualists went far beyond anything he himself would countenance.⁶ Yet this does not square easily with Pusey's own support of many Ritualist clergy, and his encouragement of churchbuilding for Ritualist clergy.⁷ Nor does it square easily with the chronology of Anglo-Catholic

theological development. If we set to one side Newman's conversion, and resist the temptation to view the Oxford Movement as somehow 'finished' by 1845, instead what emerges is a movement of two distinct but overlapping phases – the first, dominating the 1830s and early 1840s, in which the preoccupations of the Tractarians centred on issues of ministry and church authority, and the second, coming to the fore in the 1840s and running on into the 1850s, in which a particular and distinct elaboration of the theology of the eucharist occurred. The loci of this were Pusey's notorious sermon of 1841, *The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent*, his equally controversial University sermon of 1853, *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist*, Alexander Penrose Forbes, Bishop of Brechin's, views on the real presence as laid out in his 1857 *Primary charge delivered to the clergy of his diocese*, and, in the same year, John Keble's sermon *On eucharistical adoration*. This second phase paralleled, and in a way underlined, the development of ritual. Practice matched theology: the ritual 'six points' were all essentially about the eucharist, and mostly implied a doctrine of real presence in the consecrated elements, and a concept of eucharistic sacrifice – vestments, the eastward position, unleavened bread, altar lights (lit candles), mixing of water and wine, and incense.⁸ It took a Swedish Lutheran scholar, Yngve Brilioth, to point this out, for, as he said, "The re-birth of eucharistic piety is the most active of all the forms of fermentation which the Oxford Movement set working in the spiritual life of England".⁹

Bryan King was profoundly influenced by Pusey's university sermons when he was a student at Oxford, and Pusey took part in his ordination. It is most unlikely that King was unaware of the development of Pusey's thought on the eucharist. Pusey, for example, in 1848 in a sermon on 'Increased Communion', could emphasize how God was calling his followers "to new degrees of devotedness, devotion, love...He is setting a higher measure of Grace before us".¹⁰ Weekly communion, in its union of the faithful believer with God, would become "the very Centre, as it is the Fulness of your life".¹¹ King could echo Pusey's view, in emphasizing too "the deep doctrine of the Holy Eucharist and the place which that Sacrament holds in the economy of Christian grace as the one great act of Worship and Sacrifice offered by the Church to Almighty God" – indeed, for him, it was precisely to re-establish that truth and convince congregations of it that the "external adjuncts of ritual" such as vestments and altar lights were necessary.¹²

This shift in the theology of the eucharist, with renewed emphasis on regular and frequent communion, and on the "external adjuncts", found expression in ordinary parish churches – in, for example, the rising frequency of communion. Owen Chadwick's suggestion that the change was already evident in many places through the 1840s and '50s seems secure enough.¹³ The argument for increased communion as an aspect of revived worship was already won in High Church circles by then. Walter Hook, the High Church vicar of Leeds, for example, had introduced weekly communion at Leeds parish church soon after his appointment in 1837, in other words even before Pusey's controversial sermons, though this was unusual.¹⁴ But by the 1860s and 1870s, this trend was intensifying rapidly. Charles Mackeson's *Guide to the Churches of London and its Suburbs* showed that, between 1869 and 1884, the proportion of London churches with weekly celebrations of communion rose from 26 per cent to 58 per cent

- an astonishing rate of change.¹⁵ Bryan King himself noted and supported the trend. Writing long after he'd left St George's, he noted how the very same Ritualist priests who all too often were obstructed by their bishops were "endeavouring to rescue the one great act of Divine service, the one great Christian sacrifice of the Church, from the neglect and degradation to which it has been consigned for more than three centuries".¹⁶

But why should this eucharistic revival have been so controversial? After all, many Evangelicals were arguing for more frequent communion. And many of them also found a profound and even life-changing devotion to the Lord's Supper. Certainly, what King called the "external adjuncts" were themselves objects of offence, and they triggered charges of idolatry. But a broader perspective also throws some light on this, and here the rioters were perhaps not so far from the truth, for when they charged King and his ilk with 'Popery', they were of course quite consciously drawing attention to the evident similarities between the ritual practices of Anglo-Catholicism and those of the Roman Church. There are clear parallels, and some connections, between the sacramental revival pioneered by the Tractarians and encouraged by High Churchmen generally, and the Catholic revival on the continent of Europe, which took place particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Napoleonic regime in 1815. French and German Catholics read the publications of the Tractarians avidly, and there was a lively interchange of views, often but not always polemical, between Anglo-Catholics and continental Catholics from the 1830s onwards.¹⁷ In turn, many High Churchmen were reading the works of leading French Catholics, such as Charles de Montalembert, Felicité de Lamennais, and of the German Catholic theologian, Johann Adam Moehler.¹⁸ Meetings took place in London, Oxford, and Paris, between French Catholics and Oxford High Churchmen in the late 1830s and 1840s.¹⁹ High Churchmen toured the continent, observing, sometimes with admiration, sometimes with criticism, the liturgy and ritual of Catholicism.²⁰ It would not be claiming too much to suggest that, from a very broad perspective, High Church revival in Britain and the renewal of continental Catholicism were essentially parts of one overarching movement of sacramental renewal in nineteenth-century Europe, along with similar movements in confessional Lutheranism, and related too to the Gothic revival in art and architecture. Whatever you make of Anglo-Catholics' claim to be merely rediscovering or reviving the authentic spirit of historic Anglicanism, undoubtedly their doctrinal, ritual and practical innovations were of a piece with a continent-wide movement of 'Catholic' revival, something very different from the popular Protestantism of the crowds at St George's.

But there's a second dimension too, as I suggested, namely the Church-State dimension. Bryan King became a strong advocate of the disestablishment of the Church of England. Later in life, he even wrote a pamphlet on it, *Disestablishment the Present Hope of the Church* (1882). It's not difficult to see why he should have become so sceptical of the Church-State link. His difficulties started long before the riots, when he found the parish Vestry organized against him. Now this touches on aspects of English parish law not always appreciated even by church historians. The Vestry was in effect a meeting of all of the resident male householders in the parish, irrespective of their actual church affiliation or belief. It was responsible for a great many functions of civil government, as

well as for the overall maintenance of the parish church, and the appointment of churchwardens. There was nothing to stop the Vestry from electing Dissenters, or atheists even, as churchwardens. Elsewhere in Britain, and particularly in the towns, the Vestry became a focal point of Dissenting opposition to Anglicanism. King himself, and his defenders, tended to see the riots as fomented by disgruntled owners of sweat shops in the area, and brothel-keepers, but they also talked of the rioters being led by the churchwardens and by the vestrymen. We could put it this way, then. In established parish churches, such as St George's, it was often remarkably difficult for the incumbent to change the style of service substantially without provoking the irritation of parishioners who would have a means of organizing opposition to him through the Vestry meeting. But the parishioners concerned need not even be regular, or occasional, members of the congregation. Thus, the Vestry could give a powerful voice to parishioners seeking to defend the Protestant character of the Established Church against Ritual innovation.

To King and his ilk, this represented an absurd contradiction in parish Anglicanism. Again and again, King emphasized the support of his regular congregation members for his ritual innovations. And yet, to a different mindset, his motivation looked simply sectarian, perhaps inward-looking and precious, catering only for a small proportion of his parish, since his weekly congregation was relatively small. Bishop Tait certainly thought this way. For him, as the national Church, the Church of England gloried in its ability to comprehend widely different doctrinal views. The problem with Ritualism, he thought, was that it narrowed the appeal of the Church of England, and catered for just one small part of it – and that one which veered dangerously close to Rome. It is in that spirit that he could write to King, urging him to give up the vestments he had introduced, “I do beg you to give up the matters complained of, which are, I believe, a grievous impediment to your usefulness. In carrying out the simple Scriptural system of our own Church, you will receive, I assure you, all sympathy and assistance from me”.²¹ Tait's willingness to accept the complaints of the petitioners against King stemmed, not from spinelessness or indecisiveness, as King and his supporters thought, but from his conviction that the national Church was duty-bound to reflect the popular Protestantism of the petitioners – to stay close, as it were, to the founding formularies of the Church of England, and to reflect its Protestant identity closely in its worship and practice.

In summary, bringing these two points together, you see in St George's-in-the-East the conflict of two entirely different ways of conceiving of the Church of Christ. One way, influenced by High Church revival, we could call 'eucharistic community'. Here, the conviction that the eucharist was the central act of Christian worship went hand in hand with a renewed theology of real presence and eucharistic sacrifice, and it suggested that the membership of the Church was most perfectly represented by those who were confirmed and who were regular communicants. King never got the chance to develop or put in place completely this understanding of the local church, and indeed we find its most complete expression only towards the end of the century, through communicants' guilds, the early parish councils, and the communicant franchise (abandoned in 1919 in favour of the baptismal franchise). But in any case the Anglo-Catholic model of

eucharistic community was always misaligned with currents of popular devotion amongst Anglicans, and never entirely got over the generally non-eucharistic nature of popular piety. The other way, represented by Tait, was the comprehensive national Church. Here, by contrast, could be found the conviction that all the people of the parish were truly 'members' of the local church, and that the formularies of the Church of England were constructed so as best to incorporate within it the widest possible scope of belief consistent with Christian truth. Tait and King were never going to agree, or even to agree to differ.

- ¹ See e.g. David Kent, 'High Church Rituals and Rituals of Protest: the "Riots" at St George-in-the-East, 1859-1860', *The London Journal*, 24 (2007), pp. ?.
- ² W. Crouch, *Bryan King and the Riots at St. George's-in-the-East* (1904), p. 54.
- ³ See e.g. C. Clark & W. Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (2003).
- ⁴ Though I note a worthy contribution in D. Janes, *Victorian Reformation. The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England, 1840-1860* (2009).
- ⁵ This appears to be largely the view of John Shelton Reed, for example, in *Glorious Battle. The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (1996), and also of W.S.F. Pickering in *Anglo-Catholicism. A Study in Religious Ambiguity* (1989).
- ⁶ R.T. Davidson & W. Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait*, vol. I. (1891), p. 249.
- ⁷ See W.N. Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (1999), passim.
- ⁸ It is true that non-Anglo-Catholics were also perfectly capable of emphasizing the importance of regular communion – as many Evangelicals did: see C. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993).
- ⁹ Y. Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice* (SPCK, London, 1930), p. 215.
- ¹⁰ E.B. Pusey, 'Increased Communion', *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. I, For the Season from Advent to Whitsuntide (1848), p. 322.
- ¹¹ Pusey, 'Increased Communion', p. 324.
- ¹² B. King, *Sacrilege and its Encouragement, being an Account of the St George's Riots and of their Successes, in a Letter of Remonstrance to the Lord Bishop of London* (London: Joseph Masters, 1860), pp. 11-12.
- ¹³ W.O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Vol. I (London, 1966), p. 514.
- ¹⁴ W.N. Yates, *Leeds and the Oxford Movement: A Study of 'High Church' Activity in the Rural Deaneries of Allerton, Armley, Headingley and Whitkirk in the Diocese of Ripon, 1836-1934* (1975), p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p. 267.
- ¹⁶ B. King, *Disestablishment the Present Hope of the Church: an Appeal to his Brother Churchmen* (1882).
- ¹⁷ See W.G. Roe, *Lamennais and England* (OUP, Oxford, 1966), and also J.N. Morris, 'French Catholics and the Oxford Movement', in W.N. Yates (ed.), *The Oxford Movement and the Wider World* (forthcoming).
- ¹⁸ On Moehler and the Tractarians, see Franklin, R.W., *Nineteenth-century churches : the history of a new Catholicism in Württemberg, England, and France* (1997).
- ¹⁹ See Morris, 'French Catholics and the Oxford Movement', and also C. Wordsworth, *Diary in France, mainly on topics concerning Education and the Church* (1845).
- ²⁰ See, example, F. Faber, *Sights and thoughts in foreign churches and among foreign peoples* (1842), and T.W. Allies, *Journal in France* (1849).
- ²¹ Davidson & Benham, *Tait*, I, p. 235.