INTRODUCTION

Christianity is the religion of a Book, the Bible, but the translation of its message into the culture of any era has vastly expanded the literature produced by Christianity. John Wesley called himself 'a man of one book', but his own prodigious literary output shows that he did not consider other books superfluous. The Bible has spawned millions of books, not only commentaries on its text, but also works which draw upon the manifold traditions which have come to surround it, some of them deriving from the Church's classical inheritance, some of them condemnatory of any rival form of secular literature, some of them the product of major literary movements, as of Romanticism in the nineteenth century. Any reader of this volume will be struck by the variety of literary genres and types that it addresses: letters, homilies, apologetic, apocalyptic, poetry, drama and novels. As the Ecclesiastical History Society passes its fiftieth year, the range of material studied in this volume with both criticism and understanding is testimony to the long-enduring breadth of spirit and catholicity of interests of the society itself.

There is a vast range of historical themes and problems which can be explored from literary material: practical behaviour and morality; attitudes to class and social order; Church-state relations; and secular and ecclesiastical politics. One recurring theme is the tension between Christianity and culture, as to whether literature is the ally or enemy of Christianity, reflecting a wider division within the tradition between holy worldliness and other-worldliness, between loving the world in order to convert it and rejecting the world and withdrawing from it. This volume gives particular attention to one form of interaction between religion and literature, the nineteenth-century novel, both as field of conflict between Protestants and Catholics and as evidence of a more tolerant religious atmosphere. The understanding of literature invoked here is a catholic one, with the aspirations to universality of Christianity itself.

It should also be obvious that this volume is the work of histo-

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rians, and not primarily of literary critics interested in questions of style, unless this can be shown to be of wider historical significance. Thus Renie Choy shows how the clichéd formulas of the requests of ancient and early medieval letter-writers for the prayers of their correspondents were richly significant in bonding friendship and personal union between author and recipient, while seeking to effect urgent change across spiritual and geographical space. Daniel Anlezark enunciates the stress in the writings of Gregory the Great on Scripture rather than on pagan learning as the proper subject matter of a Christian's reading, and the distinction between Gregory's desire for monastic ascetic seclusion and contemplation and his response to the practical administrative demands of a Christian polity on earth, despite his belief in the approaching end of the world. This double emphasis on piety and practice passed to Gregory's English admirers and expositors, the Venerable Bede and King Alfred the Great, whose programme of cultural renewal included the translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Rule* and *Dialogues* into English.

The historical function of a literary text is significant. Jessica Lee Ehinger persuasively argues that the anti-Islamic Christian apologetic in surviving debates and letters in the eighth and ninth centuries is more a literary record of Christian arguments for Christians in a period of mass conversion to Islam than direct historical evidence of actual exchanges between Christians and Muslims. Underlying the Irish literature of chronicle and correspondence between 1066 and 1166 explored by David Dumville is the then-European movement for ecclesiastical reform, but this was linked to issues of apocalyptic, morality and the Scriptures, including catechetical *quaestiones* expressing a hair-splitting sense of humour, even diverging to explain a board game with seventy-two pieces. The indictment of ecclesiastical corruption and the need to separate the true papal spiritual authority from its abuse and from its secular political counterpart are among Dante's themes explored by John Took's study of *The Divine Comedy*, which describes the ever-deepening transformation of the soul and self through the horrors of hell, with its wealth of contemporary reference, through purgatory, under the sublime guidance of the pagan Virgil, and into heaven and the new life of Christ already present in believers through his sacramental Church, and so to the vision of the love which moves the sun and the other stars. As one of the

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greatest (perhaps the greatest) of Christian poets, Dante might also be regarded as the supreme Christian theologian.

In a study which ranges over Irish bardic poetry as well as preaching, hagiography and even travel literature, Salvador Ryan shows that there is a much greater variety and richness to the role of Christ's cross than is always recognized in the common account of the transition from an early medieval understanding of the cross as the instrument of Christ's triumph over sin and death to the later medieval depiction of the cross as a symbol of empathetic suffering. The two ideas coexisted, while the cross bore a poetically elaborated range of meanings: the cosmic light-giver; the intercessory means of salvation and consolation and of condemnation and damnation, of victory over demons and in battle and bringer of peace; and mother and refuge, there being a kind of *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ's body and the blood-soaked wood of the cross itself.

For the end of the Middle Ages, Katharine Olson explores the rich mauscript culture and Welsh literary tradition of 'The Great Century' in Wales, especially as a repository of religious devotion, and discusses the degree to which this can be said to have survived the Reformation. Here again, one is struck by the international content of late medieval religious life.

Philip Broadhead describes the manner in which Hans Sachs, the celebrated shoemaker, composer, poet and Mastersinger of Nuremberg, propagated the Reformation by casting portions of Luther's Bible into verse for public performance. His early compositions laid a heavy stress on the individual's duty to translate the Christian faith into charitable works; the later ones emphasized the need for such a translation to take an ordered and disciplined spiritual and communal form in a society ideally at unity with itself. On the other side, Eamon Duffy argues that Sir Thomas More's *Confutation* of William Tyndale's *Answer* to More's *Dialogue* is not evidence of personal loss of control in its literary form, with its copious quotations from his opponent, but is a matter of successful literary choice, later widely imitated. In its commitment to the punishment of the heresy of the Protestant martyrs and its ridicule of the marriage of monks and nuns in defiance of their vows of chastity, the *Confutation* affords evidence, not of More's guilty sexuality or hysteria and interior disintegration, but of the views of

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mainstream medieval Christendom. Here modern literary judgements have been influenced by continuing religious controversy.

George Oppitz-Trotman surveys the ambiguous yet powerful figure of Vice in Tudor drama, with its obscure origins and its associations with the themes of the actor as vagabond, of Catholicism and social disorder; its status as a figure of revenge in conflict with conscience and of moral weakness; and its connection with an anti-theatrical tradition in the theatre itself. Here again is evidence of the anti-literary strand in Christianity which did so much to make many Christians suspicious of the theatre.

W. B. Patterson shows that the puritan preacher William Perkins, in his *Arte of Prophecying*, advocated a direct and simple method of preaching which had a lasting importance for English prose and which took into account the varying levels of understanding of different categories of hearer, with an overall rhetorical concern for clear communication, in contrast to more flamboyant types of Tudor and Stuart pulpit style. Thomas Corns charts the evolution of John Milton's thought about the English Church from an initial rejection of both Calvinism and Prelacy and an aspiration to see the Church unite with foreign Protestants, with a subsequent progressive rejection of Presbyterian and Independent clerical ministries in favour of a Church requiring only the ministry of uneducated laymen. Milton's commitments to religious toleration and to freedom of expression were associated with his interest in legislation in favour of divorce, proceeding from an understanding of Christianity, usually tolerant and undogmatic (though anti-Catholic), with marked affinities to the views of many lay Anglicans today. In Sachs, Perkins and Milton we see Protestantism creating its own new literary culture.

There is also a contemporary reference to the modern preoccupation with priestly paedophilia in Colin Haydon's study of eighteenth-century English anti-Catholic pornography, especially the publications about the scandal of the Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Girard and his ecstatic penitent Marie-Catherine Cadière. The essay relates the genre of anti-Catholicism to the unpopularity of the 'out-group', from the early Christians to the modern Methodists, as well as to the enduring British Protestant repugnance at the confessional and at sacerdotal and conventual celibacy, alleged to be the origin of every sexual perversion, a preoccupation popular in the nineteenth century and today.

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A quite different view from that of the convent as an object of sexual fantasy occurs in Caroline Watkinson's account of the eighteenth-century literature recording visits to English convents on the Continent. English travellers tended to judge them well as English institutions abroad. In some cases, these tourists wanted to convince their readers of their own tolerance, but they also sympathetically recorded 'an image of nuns as sociable and engaged', cheerful and agreeable, in a more mixed depiction of conventualism than one might expect from the conception of Britain as a bastion of anti-Catholic Protestant nationalism. The theme of the alien recurs in Benjamin Fischer's argument that because the fast expanding world of British Protestant Evangelicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was opposed to the increasing popularity of novels and of secular periodicals, it found a counterweight to the excitements of fiction in the exotic factuality of the travelogues and biographies of missionaries.

Where Evangelicals at first tended to oppose the new Romantic culture even while drawing upon it, the Oxford Movement tried to make it Catholic. John Boneham demonstrates the literary importance of the movement's principle of reserve, of faith as the appropriation of the Christian mystery by the religious mind and heart, with the concomitant idea that the mystery was better conveyed in poetry than in prose. In his three poems, *The Cathedral*, *The Baptistery* and *The Altar*, the Tractarian poet Isaac Williams draws on imagery from ecclesiastical architecture and art as well as from nature as the work of its creator, to expound the doctrines of the eucharistic sacrifice, apostolic succession through episcopal and priestly ministry, and tradition. George Herring shows how another Tractarian cleric, W. E. Heygate, attempted in his novel *William Blake* to depict an idealized reforming English country parson and his conversion to high churchmanship of a young farmer. This had its social dimension in the aspiration to reduce class barriers through social paternalism, though this was not very effective in society at large. The difficult relationship between religion and culture recurs in Kathleen Jaeger's account of the Roman Catholic convert and novelist Lady Georgiana Fullerton, who experienced a deep division within herself, exacerbated by her confessor Fr Frederick Faber, between her ' "personality" as an artist and her "character" as a religious', discouraging to her

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literary activity and suggesting no easy resolution of the problem of Christian and worldly modes of life.

The huge increase in the volume of nineteenth-century popular fiction was exploited by a host of Christian writers. Martin Spence shows how an evangelical competition open to working men, on the value of the Sabbath, drew on Romantic and democratic arguments as well as explicitly scriptural ones. The Protestant adoption of the once suspect genre of the novel appears in Mark Smith's sketch of the nineteenth-century English fiction about the 'aboriginal Protestant' Waldensians of the Savoy, which depicted them as poor but godly and industrious peasant mountaineers, the victims of Catholic persecution. Anti-Jesuitism was also common among Catholics, and John Wolffe's analysis of anti-Jesuit novels discerns a frequent distinction between evil Jesuits and other, innocent, Catholics. Described by David Brooks as in a class of its own is Benjamin Disraeli's imaginative blend of Anglo-Catholicism, philo-Judaism and nationalist Tory paternalism in his celebrated 'Young England' trilogy of novels urging the moral renewal of English society in the 1840s.

The reader returns to the literary heights with the religion of Charles Dickens. Here Andrew Sanders rejects the idea of a purely secular or humanitarian Dickens, instancing his reverence for the person of Christ and for the New Testament, his profession of Christianity to his children, and his preoccupation, most obviously in *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the theme of the Resurrection, both here and in the hereafter. There is an affinity here with Milton's lay Christianity reaching across the centuries.

The softening of denominational differences appears in Clyde Binfield's account, in the mingling of political radicalism, Anglicanism and Nonconformity in the novels, based upon different generations of one family, by Ada Ellen Bayly under her pen name of Edna Lyall. Martin Wellings shows how the best-selling novels of the enormously prolific Cornish brothers Silas and Joseph Hocking, both sometime ministers of the United Methodist Free Churches, preached an increasingly nondenominational practical and undogmatic Christianity representing the place of the fast expanding body of Nonconformist readers in the wider British culture.

Bernard Hamilton suggests that the lack of polemic in literary references to the papacy, a very mixed bag which includes the

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works of Frederick Rolfe and Ronald Firbank, might have to do with the diminished importance of the popes after the loss of papal temporal power in 1870. On the other hand, in Oliver Logan's exposition, the militantly ultramontane Fr Antonio Bresciani's novels, originally serialized in the Roman Jesuit gazette *La Civiltà Cattolica*, attacked the *Risorgimento* and Freemasonry through novels of conversion to Catholicism, with youthful heroes and heroines whose passions are tamed by Jesuit pastoral sensitivity. Particularly striking is Fr Bresciani's depiction of women as both tender and tough, and readers may be tempted to learn more about Olga the Croat 'who has managed to join the Austrian army' and Ermine the Eskimo maiden, 'sensitive and compassionate, who can gut a bear and fell a maddened bison with a single pistol-shot'. One imagines Pio Nono putting up his feet in the evening for a good fictional read.

My own essay on the Catholic novelist Canon Patrick Augustine Sheehan attempts to show how through the plots of his novels he comments on many aspects of his faith and his country; 'on the strengths and weaknesses of Irish clerical training and of the Irish Catholic clergy, on the Church's role in Irish life, on the central role of women, on the Irish nationalist tradition in both its constitutional and revolutionary forms, on Irish poverty, capitalism, strikes and emigration to America, on the need for the regeneration of Irish culture through a Catholic literature, and on English landlordism and colonialism and their effects on Irish life'.

Judith Maltby draws attention to the highly literary foundation and character of the novelist Rose Macaulay's commitment to Anglicanism. While dissenting from the destruction wrought by the Reformation, subscribing to a High Anglican view of English church history and professing a strong sacramentalism, she was repelled by the realistic symbolism and doctrinal sharpness of both Anglican papalism and Roman Catholicism. Peter Webster underlines the continuing moral consensus between Church and state in England in the convention under which the Lord Chamberlain, as licenser of the theatre, sometimes consulted the archbishop of Canterbury about plays with a moral or religious theme. The loss of this moral consensus and the gap between the Victorians and their successors within the Church as well as in society at large underlie Stuart Mews's account of the controversy surrounding Bishop John Robinson's testimony in court in 1960 on behalf of

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D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Sarah Foot suggests that the modern detective story with a monastic detective depicts the medieval monastery without much realism as a vaguely semi-Anglican pseudo-medieval pre-modern Eden of peace, which is unspecific about monastic observance itself, a refuge from modern secular sin and chaos: when it is disturbed by a murder, there is an Eden to be restored.

If the medieval monastic novel is clearly a reflection of modern culture, despite its setting, another popular form clearly stands in opposition to modernity in general. Crawford Gribben analyses another best-selling form of literature, the 'Left Behind' novels of the Rapture, drawing on the evangelical pre-millennial dispensational theory of the imminent return of Christ to sweep believers to heaven while leaving the rest in a period of tribulation and conflict with Antichrist on earth. More especially, Gribben shows the prevalence of an activist individualism in this literature, its neglect of prayer and other departures from the pre-existing evangelical tradition, and its counter-cultural anxiety about its own possible marginalization and failure.

With Dr Gribben, the reader may feel that much of the literature surveyed here is of no very great literary quality, embodying the paradox of an anti-literary literature, but all is grist to the mill of the historian, and popular taste may be more revealing of matters of great historical moment than the high literature of a cultivated elite. From Gregory the Great to Dante, from Milton to Dickens, the subject has its peaks as well as its troughs, but the troughs can be as interesting as the peaks. The Word was made flesh in Christ, and is also transmitted through the material in sacraments and sacramentals and in visual art. But the transition from the religion of the Word into other words has an importance which historians cannot neglect if they wish to understand Christian culture and its relationship to ecclesiastical history.

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