'A SAINT IF EVER THERE WAS ONE': HENRY ROBERT REYNOLDS (1825–96)

by CLYDE BINFIELD

A 'saint if ever there was one, but who might have been a little more effective had there been in his nature some slight traces of the old Adam'.[1] Thus William Hardy Harwood (1856–1924) reflecting on a past member of *Sub Rosa*, a long-established essay club for Congregational ministers in Greater London. Harwood could only have known this particular saint for four years and perhaps his recollection is best seen as a businesslike minister's snapshot of an other-worldliness outside the normal run of Nonconformist experience. It betrays a degree of affectionate irritation. It is almost a dismissal. Free Churchmen don't do saints.

Saints are exemplary witnesses. They are intercessors and confessors; they combine piety with authority. They are credible Christians, more easily recognized than defined, save in retrospect. They are people of position in the Christian economy, who might indeed be bishops. In popular eyes their influence is less quotidian than eternal; they lift the gaze to extreme, if divine, horizons. If sanctity is a mark of the Holy Catholic Church, saints are necessary to its understanding. Of course Free Churchmen do saints.

For tradition-conscious Congregationalists, saints are church members, the men and women gathered in covenanted fellowship. Each such fellowship is the Church; that is the Congregational understanding. Here are serious people, in the world but no longer of it. Their integrity and credibility are manifest among their own sort; they are consistent exemplars of what are now called Victorian values. Worldly success is a natural consequence for some, a quality of goodness is an assumption for all, but in popular eyes that goodness edges into the sort of unworldliness too easily associated with failure.

Henry Robert Reynolds, Harwood's 'saint if ever there was one', fits this mould. He exemplifies Congregational sanctity, at once

[1] Albert Peel, 'The *Sub Rosa*', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 12.3 (April 1934), 132–41, at 138.

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representative and rare. His credibility ranged from the worldly to the other-worldly. He was socially credible; he had private means; his brother was a medical baronet; there were family connections with the legal, military, clerical, academic and landed establishments; and his voice and bearing – he was tall, graceful, and presidential, a superfine Abraham Lincoln – were those of his class.[2] His denominational credibility was unimpeachable; there were family connections with Congregationalism's lay and ministerial establishments and his career, which was also his vocation, cemented this. Abbey Chapel, Romsey, the church in which he was reared, and Old Meeting, Halstead, the church to which he first ministered, were the sort to have had county voters in their congregations; two of Reynolds's sisters married into such families.[3] East Parade, Leeds, then in its golden age, was the church where Reynolds first made his national mark; it was also Leeds's 'Bainesocracy' at prayer and a third sister married into the Bainesocracy.[4] A successful Congregational minister needed to have personal, pastoral, and preaching skills of a high order; he was a bishop as the early Church first understood that office. The church books of Old Meeting and East Parade testify to Reynolds's ministerial skills.[5] As a pastor he was revered, almost worshipped, especially by the women of his congregation, whose education he fostered to university extension level before such a concept was in general currency.[6] As a person he was no less credible, loved, indeed adored, as friend, son, husband, brother and uncle; he had no children. He comes across as alert, companionable, cultivated, the shrewdest but gentlest of

[2] The main source is *Henry Robert Reynolds D.D.: His Life and Letters Edited by his Sisters, with Portraits* (London, 1898); Reynolds and his brother, Sir John Russell Reynolds (1828–96), have entries in *ODNB*.

[3] Sarah Fletcher Reynolds married John Bird Best (d. 1902), gentleman farmer of Dorset and Hertfordshire; Harriet Reynolds married John Savill Vaizey: the Vaizeys of Attwoods and Star Stile, Halstead, were an armigerous landowning family. County voters were those who were entitled to vote in county constituencies, by virtue of their property-holding qualifications (the so-called 'forty-shilling freeholders'). Electoral reform from 1832 onwards, of course, changed the basis of the franchise.

[4] Through the influence conferred by their newspaper, *The Leeds Mercury*, the Baines family shaped and dominated Leeds Liberalism, hence the term, 'Bainesocracy', to denote the peak of their influence, which lasted from the 1830s to the 1870s. Susanna Reynolds married Frederick Baines (1811–93).

[5] The interaction of East Parade and the Bainesocracy is developed in C. Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780–1920* (London, 1977), 54–100.

[6] *Life and Letters*, 88–92.

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teases, politically liberal, enthused by Wordsworth, enraptured by Ruskin, liberated by travel, enchanted by Switzerland and Italy, stretched by Egypt. His appreciation of art, literature and music was discerning if conventional. He enjoyed an encounter with Coventry Patmore in 1867; he wanted to know more of the young J. M. Barrie in 1889.[7]

There is more. After fourteen years in pastoral charge he was for thirty-four years a college principal. At Cheshunt College he flowered as teacher, scholar and denominational heavyweight, credible as each. This childless man came into his own as a father in God; Cheshunt's students, mostly in their twenties, were 'his boys'.[8] He assisted at their ordinations and their inductions. The Reynolds tone could be heard in Congregational pulpits from the 1860s to the 1930s. No wonder that he was first choice to preside at special communion services or that he was urged at least twice to consider the chairmanship of the national Congregational Union.[9] A Congregational college principal was thus a bishop as many fellow ministers were not. He was certainly a public figure. Reynolds breakfasted with Gladstone and welcomed Russell and Shaftesbury as a matter of course to his college platforms; his family knew Palmerston.[10] His learning (rewarded in 1869 by an Edinburgh DD) contributed to this. He published five collections of sermons and addresses; commentaries on Amos and Hosea (jointly with a colleague) and St John's Gospel; studies of John the Baptist, Athanasius and Buddhism.[11] He edited two volumes, suggestively called *Ecclesia*, to which his own contributions were on 'The Forgiveness and Absolution of Sins' and 'The Catholic Church'.[12] He also edited or co-edited two journals and a popular, if unof-

7 Ibid. 208, 430.

8 [C. Newman Hall], *Newman Hall: An Autobiography* (London, 1898), 302.

9 In 1883 and 1891: A. Peel, *Letters to a Victorian Editor: Henry Allon, Editor of the British Quarterly Review* (London, 1929), 339–40; *Life and Letters*, 442.

10 This perhaps surprising link dates from Reynolds's Romsey days: Broadlands, Palmerston's estate, was nearby: *Life and Letters*, 6–8.

11 [With O. C. Whitehouse], 'Hosea' and 'Amos', in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Old Testament Commentary for English Readers*, 5 vols (London, 1882–4), 5: 411–34, 449–67; *The Pulpit Commentary: Introduction to the Gospel of St. John, with Exposition and Commentary* (London, 1888); *John the Baptist* (London, 1874); *Athanasius: His Life and Life-work* (London, 1889); *Buddhism: A Comparison and a Contrast between Buddhism and Christianity* (London, 1883).

12 'The Forgiveness and Absolution of Sins', in *Ecclesia: Church Problems considered in a Series of Essays* (London, 1870), 243–312; 'The Catholic Church', in *Ecclesia: A Second*

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ficial, denominational hymnbook, and he was the joint author of a novel, *Yes and No, or Glimpses of the Great Conflict*, which few seem to have read.[13] His publishers ranged from Macmillan and Hodder and Stoughton to the Religious Tract Society. He served on the committee of the London Library but election to the Athenaeum came too late for his health to allow him to take advantage of it.[14]

Such building blocks for sanctity are easily extracted from an admirable hagiography, Reynolds's *Life and Letters*, edited (with portraits) by his sisters. And was there the unworldliness so easily associated with failure? That is suggested by the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in which Reynolds is plausibly yet unfairly depicted as theologically conservative, presiding latterly over declining student numbers, financial crisis and defections to the National Church.[15]

The hagiography and the national biography, the one a compilation, the other a distillation, are not the only evidence. There is the testimony of his writings, cumulatively impressive, difficult to compartmentalize. Most interesting of all, there is the question of his influence, its context, nature and extent. Five personal testimonies might here be offered to bolster Harwood's snapshot. They come from individuals, four men and a woman, who knew Reynolds for longer than Harwood and at different stages of his ministry.

Lydia Rawson's family were entrenched in Leeds's professional, commercial, political and cultural life. She recalled the two girls' classes for which she was responsible at East Parade in 1857–8: 'Well, they just worshipped him, and I expect I helped them, for to me he was a sort of impersonated Christ'.[16]

George Burch (1852–1914) was a Cheshunt boy to whom Reynolds lent science books. In due course Burch became one of Reynolds's 'boys' at Cheshunt, training for the Congregational

Series of Essays on Theological and Ecclesiastical Questions by Various Writers (London, 1871), 113–71.

[13] Co-editor, *British Quarterly Review*, 1866–74; editor, *Evangelical Magazine*, 1877–82; *The Leeds Hymn Book* (1853); [with John Russell Reynolds], *Yes and No, or Glimpses of the Great Conflict* (London, 1860).

[14] *Life and Letters*, 226–7, 290.

[15] In Reynolds's time numbers fluctuated without declining overall; the constant deficit of the 1880s did not amount to crisis; the 'defections', though painful to Reynolds, did not run counter to Cheshunt's foundation.

[16] *Life and Letters*, 144.

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ministry. After five years, first as an assistant at East Parade and then in Oxford, he left the ministry for higher education, a chair in physics and a fellowship of the Royal Society.[17] He was, therefore, one of Reynolds's failures, though neither of them saw it like that. 'If Congregationalism had its saints', Burch wrote of Reynolds after his death, 'he would be one of them'.[18]

James Hirst Hollowell (1851–1909) was another of Reynolds's 'boys' in the 1870s. He remained in Congregational pastoral charge for twenty years before changing course to become the Northern Counties Education League's organizing secretary. As a strenuous exponent of the Nonconformist Conscience, Hollowell might seem to have outgrown Reynolds; he was certainly at odds with some of Reynolds's Baines relations, but he remained unswerving in his veneration for one whom he recalled as 'at once the ideal and the despair of successive generations of students ... [T]o be permitted to know a saint at close quarters is a rare privilege for a student to enjoy'.[19]

R. F. Horton (1855–1934) was not one of Reynolds's 'boys'. He had no formal ministerial training (beyond an Oxford fellowship), indeed he was never ordained, but for fifty years he sustained a north London pastorate of almost legendary intensity. Fifteen years into that pastorate he was invited to succeed Reynolds at Cheshunt. Horton declined, although for him too Reynolds had 'all the qualities of a saint, humility and humour, boundless sympathies and unfailing love of God'.[20]

Newman Hall (1816–1902) was a metropolitan pulpiteer from an earlier generation. Hall and Reynolds were old friends, their friendship marked by a shared Gladstonianism of purest essence and confirmed by Reynolds's sympathetic stance at the time of Hall's divorce and remarriage in 1880.[21] They spoke the same language. 'My dearest and oldest friend went home,' Hall wrote in September 1896:

[17] For Burch's ministerial career, see W. H. Summers, *History of the Congregational Churches in the Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks Association* (Newbury, 1905), 253; for his subsequent career, see *Who Was Who, 1897–1916* (London, 1920), *s.n.* 'Burch, George James'.

[18] *Life and Letters*, 546.

[19] W. Evans and W. Claridge, *James Hirst Hollowell and the Movement for Civic Control in Education* (Manchester, 1911), 11–12.

[20] A. Peel and J. A. R. Marriott, *Robert Forman Horton* (London, 1937), 205.

[21] [Hall], *Autobiography*, 332.

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> He ... sank gently to sleep in Jesus. That afternoon I went to weep with the two loving sisters at Broxbourne. We gave thanks together for his manly strength and womanly tenderness: his learning, wisdom, usefulness, and humility; above all his entire reliance upon and consecration to Christ. How he sympathised in grief and rejoiced in joy as his own! He was an Apostle John. What a treasure is the memory of his love, the consciousness of its perpetuation, and the assured hope of its endless perfection in the love and glory of the Elder Brother.[22]

Christlike, apostolic, saintly: the testimony is uniform. Hall's tribute is the most artful of the five; it aptly introduces us to Reynolds's influence as pastor, teacher of pastors and father in God. Hall's word-picture of friendship, brotherhood and family transcends gendered qualities. In taking us to the sisters at Broxbourne, he takes us back to the sisters of Bethany. Their brother, however, is less Lazarus than John, eternally young at the foot of the cross, the author, it will be recalled, of a well-regarded commentary on the Apostle John.[23] Here, in short, is the carefully suggestive artistry of a High Victorian sermon, almost sentimental, certainly intense. This is not the language of theological conservatism, although theological conservatives might be comforted by it. This was Reynolds's own style, however playfully acute his letters or relatively unadorned his published sermons in illustration and diction.

Reynolds's health determined how he balanced preaching, teaching and pastoring. It was his health which diverted the young Leeds pulpit prince to the self-consciously academic groves of Cheshunt College in sub-rural, semi-metropolitan Hertfordshire, and it was his health which prevented his preaching from the mid-1860s to the late 1880s. Of the eight English Congregational colleges, however, Cheshunt was the likeliest to release Reynolds's strength and turn his health to best use.[24]

Strictly speaking, Cheshunt was not a Congregational college at all.[25] Founded by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and opened

[22] Ibid. 305.

[23] See n. 11 above.

[24] S. C. Orchard, *Cheshunt College* (Saffron Walden, 1968), esp. 12–13.

[25] The following paragraph is based on the entry placed annually in the *Congregational Year Book* [hereafter *CYB*], in this instance *CYB*, 1870, 333. In 1858 there were

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at Talgarth in Wales by George Whitefield on St Bartholomew's Day 1768, it had moved to Hertfordshire on St Bartholomew's Day 1792. It was thus a product of the strand of the Evangelical Revival which was associated with Whitefield, with a particular duty to that distinctive legal entity, the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Its principles were Calvinistic, 'set forth in fifteen articles, substantially the doctrinal articles of the Church of England'. The college's tutors (there were usually four) and students (in Reynolds's time they ranged through the thirties) were required to assent to those articles. That apart – though for the scrupulous it was a considerable barrier – the Countess's foundation was proud of its evangelical catholicity. Its object was 'not to serve the interests of a party, but to preserve the extension of the kingdom of Immanuel by the publication of His glorious gospel, and the doctrines of His grace'. Its young men were 'left entirely free in their choice of the denomination of Christians among whom they may prefer to exercise their ministry'. They were certainly young, Reynolds's 'boys' indeed, unmarried, under twenty-eight, in residence for between two and five years depending on their attainments.

In practice Cheshunt trained men for the Congregational ministry, but the liturgy of its worship was shaped (some felt constrained) by the Book of Common Prayer, and a president who took its foundation seriously was bound to develop an understanding of the Church catholic as opposed to its sects and connexions. And its annual Commemoration furnished a grand occasion for exploiting the unlikeliest unions. As Reynolds wrote to an old Leeds friend:

> A Cheshunt Anniversary Festival is a unique affair. Nowhere else do old nobles and modern merchants, church dignitaries and raw dissenting parsons, liturgical forms and constitutional nonconformity, surplices and extemporaneous effusions, the incense of roses and the memories of the wilderness, ugliness and prettiness so picturesquely blend for an hour or two. Everybody seemed at home, marchionesses and nursery maids, prizemen and old fogies who believe that competitive

twenty-two students; twenty-nine in 1869; thirty-nine in 1878; thirty-three in 1893; the college was third in size of the eight English colleges in 1860.

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> examinations are the modern abomination of desolation in the temple of truth.[26]

That was written in 1875 in the wake of a major centenary rebuilding and enlargement which encompassed a spired tower, a cloister, a boldly apsed chapel and a library on the lines of the famous kitchens at Glastonbury or Fontevrault.[27]

There was a further dimension, this time universal. Cheshunt had a tradition, which Reynolds fostered, of preparing men for service overseas, particularly with the London Missionary Society. The society, like the college, was effectively Congregational but, like the college, its foundation was nondenominational. The society had stations in Africa, India, China and the South Seas; Cheshunt men were thus to be found worldwide, lower-middle-class Britons encountering indigenous cultures and alien world religions in the age of Darwin, Higher Criticism and imperialism. Those challenges were very new. The missionary imperative was also new but it had a head, indeed a heady, start. Reynolds was the man to shape the inevitable meeting of minds and cultures, as his writings tantalizingly suggest.

There is an almost seamless consistency about Reynolds's writing. This may be a matter of style but this style denotes the man. Its keynote is catholicity, or at least comprehensiveness. There can be no doubt as to who Reynolds is or where he stands. The author is preacher, pastor, scholar, teacher; minister, in short, of word and sacrament, although that phrase only became popular among Congregationalism's High Churchmen well after Reynolds's death. He is an evangelical Dissenter (by 1870 he prefers to speak of 'Free Churches') and a Congregationalist. Yet he is impossible to pigeon-hole.

Reynolds could be assigned to no party. Perhaps that was a matter of breeding mixed with temperament; because his foundations were sure, he could build liberally on them. 'Liberal' is an unavoidable word. Reynolds's greatest admirers were old students whose liberalism was notorious in the churches.[28] He was hardly one of them, but his unassailed standing in the churches helps

[26] *Life and Letters*, 281.

[27] *CYB*, 1875, 382, 436.

[28] A representative example is William Garrett Horder (1841–1922), notable hymnologist, whose departure from Wood Green to Bradford in 1893 was graced by

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to explain the evolution of a Congregational mindset, Congregationalism's position at Evangelicalism's most liberal edge, and its mediating role as Christian bodies moved from evangelical cooperation to interdenominationalism and on to full (if unfulfilled) ecumenism. This suggests political skills, for which Reynolds had the intellect and temperament but not the physical strength, and it indicates a quality of Christian life, attitude and influence. This man, so easily dismissed as a saint, proves to be a deceptively useful Christian leader, with his leadership a function of his saintliness.

Its foundation was the Evangelicalism to which his father, John Robert Reynolds, had been converted in 1809–10 while serving as attaché to the British minister in Washington.[29] John Reynolds was a Congregational minister from 1812 to 1862. In 1865 Henry Reynolds published *Notes of the Christian Life*, nineteen sermons, some preached to his students but others to working men or Sunday school teachers, or on special occasions, perhaps at East Parade; one was for the ordination of a missionary bound for Shanghai.[30] Clear in their diction, reasonable in their logic, mounting and unassailable in their appeal, they are a younger preacher's version of an older generation's measure. Preaching is life or death. It brings men and women to the cross. They might be working men, assembled on the last night of the year, whom Reynolds briefly transports to Canada:

> A party of boatmen on the Niagara river may have a very strong opinion when they are caught by the rapids that it is very pleasant rowing; but neither their shouts nor their merriment will alter the fact that the world's cataract is close at hand. You have a strong opinion that hell-fire is a delusion; that they are superstitious, and cruel and ignorant who ask you to pause, and awake, and prepare for this coming, this continued retribution; but your opinion will not have the slightest, the remotest, the minutest influence on the tremendous fact.[31]

Reynolds and who was to the fore in arranging a Cheshunt memorial for Reynolds: *Life and Letters*, 277, 335.

[29] For John Robert Reynolds (1782–1862), see *CYB*, 1863, 256–60; *Life and Letters*, 2–8; Charles E. Surman, 'Leaf Square Academy, Pendleton, 1811–1813', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 13.2 (September 1938), 107–17, at 111.

[30] H. R. Reynolds, *Notes of the Christian Life: A Selection of Sermons* (London, 1865).

[31] 'The Judgment of God', in *Notes*, 386–411, at 400.

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Or they might be Sunday school teachers, the Church's vital auxiliaries in salvation: 'you are ... extinguishing the fires of hell. There they are, those fires, smouldering in young hearts, but you are pouring upon them that water of life which can quench the fires of lust and wash away the ashes of it, which can refresh and animate the whole nature'.[32]

Such passages, however, represent the style rather than the tone of Reynolds's sermons. It is the presence of God and its consequences which are this preacher's true concern: 'No one fully recognises the presence of God unless he has ... been to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and there comprehended the righteousness and the love of God, and he has gone back into the great region of conscience, of reason, and of nature, with the lesson he learned *there*'.[33] Good preachers should sense how they might be misheard, especially if speaking to budding preachers. How was Reynolds heard on this occasion?

> I have to announce to you, by God's ordinance of preaching, that you are the offspring of God, the brethren of Jesus. If you will not believe ... you must suffer the consequence of this wilful ignorance ... My brethren, if you will not believe the Fatherhood of God in Christ you are condemned already to the second death ... You are left to the God of the philosophers, to cold laws, to the miserable creations of priestcraft, superstition, and guilty conscience.[34]

What are the trigger words? 'Philosophers', 'priestcraft', 'superstition'? Or 'Fatherhood' and 'brethren'? What are the trigger phrases? 'The life of the holy is the life of God'; 'The life of the Christian is a manifestation of the mind of God'.[35] Life in God was the note which Reynolds struck most insistently. And the consequent mission?

Long before John Oxenham's bestseller, *The Hidden Years*,[36] Reynolds directed his hearers' attention to the hidden years of one 'working in a carpenter's shop in a small Galilean village, quite as much shut out from the rest of the world as some of the hamlets

[32] 'The Teacher and the Taught', in *Notes*, 311–33, at 322.
[33] 'The Two Lives', in *Notes*, 1–23, at 16.
[34] 'About the Father's Business', in *Notes*, 185–206, at 200–1.
[35] 'The Two Lives', 1; 'Unity in Diversity', in *Notes*, 44–66, at 47.
[36] 'John Oxenham' [W. A. Dunkerley], *The Hidden Years* (London, 1925).

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of Northumberland are now hidden from London, Birmingham, or Paris'.[37] Brushing away 'cobwebs of human fancy', he seized on the one 'point of light' in those years: the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple at Passover. That moment, recently captured by a 'great effort of modern art',[38] 'contained the first words of the Word of God, as they have been registered by the Spirit of all truth': 'I must be about My Father's business' (Luke 2: 49). 'The first great discovery that Jesus made ... was this, that God was His own Father'. Those words established in that twelve-year-old boy 'the bond of union between earth and heaven'. The concept gripped Reynolds. Such Fatherhood illuminated the missionary imitation of Christ, Son and Elder Brother. This was not to 'itinerate the country, preach the same message, venture to work miracles, attempt to introduce into England what was peculiar to Palestine'. It was to drink in Christ's spirit.[39] There could be no more intense a privilege; and such fatherhood and brotherhood drew men into the Church:

> In much of His special work it is impossible to imitate Him. We cannot atone for human sin; we cannot confer upon others a righteousness that we can never earn. Still we may have fellowship with the sufferings of Jesus, and be made conformable to His death. We may sympathize in His agony, drink of His cup, and be baptized with His baptism.[40]

This spirit transformed the missionary imperative. Reynolds himself ventured no further than the nearest East but he was an intrepidly vicarious missionary explorer, immersed in distant cultures and religions, convinced by his studies that the 'history of Christian mission is the heroic history of humanity'.[41] 'Do not suppose that *you* take with you the Divine Being', he told the 'beloved brother' whom he was commissioning to Shanghai:

[37] 'About the Father's Business', 187.

[38] Ibid. 188, 192. Was this sermon preached at East Parade? T. E. Plint (1823–61), stockbroker, art collector and Bainesocrat, was a deacon at East Parade; he owned Millais's 'Christ in the Carpenter's Shop' (1849–50); his purchase of Holman Hunt's 'Finding of Christ in the Temple' (1859–60), the sensation of the season, contributed to his financial collapse: Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996), 179–86, 460–1.

[39] 'About the Father's Business', 193, 199, 194, 195.

[40] Ibid. 197.

[41] 'The Summons to Holy Work', in *Notes*, 283–310, at 308.

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> He is there before you in every heathen's soul, in every throb of conscience, in every laudable emotion, in every glimpse of truth, in every predisposition and susceptibility for the revelation of heaven, in all the structure and facilities of that marvellous language ... in all the stupendous march of His providence, and in the wages of sin that He has imposed upon transgressors. Christ is there, ... is there now, in China ... Your heart will tell you, more than any rules of logic, more than any human instructions, where He is working. Discover and use the leverage of good that there is in the hearts of these men, and be faithful to this talent of judgment that God has given you.[42]

Again, what was heard here? The call? The response? The understanding? There are some suggestive, almost disconcerting previews in these sermons from the late 1850s and early 1860s. Reynolds lived in the world of Mrs Alexander's 'All things bright and beautiful' ('He gives to peacocks and hummingbirds, and serpents beautiful dresses; and He gives to the little insect of a day an idle life. But He often clothes His noblest children with rags')[43] but he anticipates T. H. Green with his sense of God's immanence ('God and man are at one with each other ... Viewed on the side of God, it is the Divine Mind working out His vast designs ... ; as consciously realized in the heart of man, all is free, and the desires of his heart are fulfilled'),[44] and there is a foretaste of that Congregational deviation, Christian Science ('All disease is a ghastly parody on the condition of the human soul').[45] Most striking of all, especially when shared with an assembly of Sunday school teachers, so many drawn from society's mental artmen, is Reynolds's gloss on the authority of Scripture and the Reformed economy of election:

> We are working all of us a pattern that we cannot see in the great loom of God. We are writing our own biography and

[42] 'Faithfulness unto Death', in *Notes*, 353–85, at 367–8. The 'beloved brother', whom the published sermon leaves unidentified, was Robert Dawson (1836–1906), whose missionary vocation, curtailed in Shanghai by illness, was reborn in the London City Mission. I am indebted to Revd Nigel Lemon for confirmation of this.

[43] 'About the Father's Business', 201.

[44] 'Delight in the Lord', in *Notes*, 111–29, at 119.

[45] 'The Withered Hand', in *Notes*, 207–24, at 208.

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> our observations of God's ways on paper where already there has been traced the handwriting of Providence. We are playing with the 'loaded dice of God', and working out His designs with our free-will ... And now, my brethren, God has given you a message to convey for Him to those who know it not ... you are entrusted with God's message; you have to convey to them the very idea of a righteous Ruler and of a loving Father. You are workers for God ...[46]

One can see how Reynolds accommodated himself and his students to his college's fifteen doctrinal articles. Such, too, is the preacher's perilous responsibility in churches which regard preaching as an ordinance.

Reynolds's temperament was eirenic, sometimes wryly so: 'it is not impossible that the Lord who gave His image to the Anglo-Saxon and the Bedouin, to the Circassian and the Negro, may have given the life of His Spirit to the Catholic and the Presbyterian. The beginning of the divine life is very varied'.[47] The Church was an earthly end of that divine life and it was in addressing the Church's true working classes, the Sunday school teachers, that Reynolds spoke most naturally of 'the prayers, the wishes, the yearning tenderness of all the Catholic Church of God'.[48] His sense of that Church was as intense as confessed Catholics would have found it diffuse. It inspired *Ecclesia*, the two volumes of essays which he edited in 1870–1 to demonstrate 'the extent to which it is reasonable for Congregationalists to claim the designation of Christian and Catholic',[49] and it lay behind the surprisingly sharp, well-turned, logic of his own essay on 'The Catholic Church':

> .... cultivated classes in China, to the present day, hold the civilization of all the rest of the world in undisguised contempt. Surely the tone of the Anglican, Greek, and Roman Catholic Churches with reference to all other communions is profoundly Chinese in its bitterness and unreasoning self-importance. The spirit of Christianity is opposed to this mere *esprit de corps*.[50]

[46] 'The Teacher and the Taught', 315–16.
[47] 'The Two Lives', 3.
[48] 'The Teacher and the Taught', 321.
[49] *Ecclesia: Second Series*, ii.
[50] 'The Catholic Church', ibid. 164.

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The ultimate opportunity for Reynolds to celebrate his Catholic vision came in October 1889 at the opening of Mansfield, the theological college which Congregationalists had built close to the heart of Oxford. Reynolds, assisted by R. F. Horton, presided at the communion service held in its astonishing chapel.[51] This was an unusual occasion for Congregationalists for no church had been or was likely to be formed in this chapel and the deacons who sat with Reynolds at Mansfield's table were laymen drawn nationwide to serve a congregation of lay people and ministers similarly drawn nationwide. The boldness of the enterprise was exciting, the symbolism impressive. Reynolds drew on two great Oxford movements, the previous century's Evangelicalism and the present century's Anglo-Catholicism, to anticipate 'a greater movement than either'. He placed particular weight on the 'Anglo-Catholic conception', which he thought 'a wonderful step in the right direction': 'And it seems to us that the church principle of which we are the guardians does but carry out to its full expression a similar law of love'.[52] So Reynolds broke the Word before offering the bread and the wine for the first time in the new college's chapel:

> We are seated at a table where the Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Saints, and Confessors of every age are feasting still. We join with the Fathers of the Early Church, and with many who were cast out as evil thinkers and wrongdoers, with Reformers and Puritans, and with those who swore Holy Leagues and Covenants in their blood, and we know we are in Him. We are creating no new society, but realising the fact of a brotherhood created by the Holy Ghost. We are not inaugurating but claiming a fellowship with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.[53]

There spoke – in the classic Congregational sense – one of the saints.

After his death, Reynolds was commemorated in Cheshunt College's chapel by a window with two lights, one depicting St

[51] *Mansfield College, Oxford: Its Origin and Opening: October 14–16, 1889* (London, 1890), 81–93.

[52] Ibid. 88, 90.

[53] Ibid. 93.

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John the Baptist, the other St John the Divine,[54] but a different image might more aptly preface such oral tradition as often characterizes saints. The image is recollected by the daughter of one of Reynolds's tutorial colleagues:

> The yearly photographic groups of the eighties are thoroughly characteristic – they suggest a sort of patriarchal system under a most dignified and gracious leader, Dr. Reynolds. There he sits in the centre with Mrs. Reynolds and the other College ladies on either side, Mr. Todhunter [a tutor] and my father standing close behind with two or three rows of students; in the foreground are the tutors' small children in the careful keeping of their chosen friends from among the students, while completing the group at one side stands the gardener, rake in hand.[55]

The oral tradition comes from the Seventy-ninth Free Church Congress, Sheffield, March 1975. Two Dissenting primates, the United Reformed Church's John Huxtable and the Baptist Union's Ernest Payne, men of equal weight in the British and World Councils of Churches, were relaxing in conversation.[56] Huxtable was recalling Ben Butcher, a hero of the Papuan mission field, who had died not too long before. Butcher was too young to have been one of Reynolds's boys but, as a raw Cheshunt man, nineteen years old at most, he encountered Reynolds in classic student circumstances. Butcher and a friend had determined to teach a bumptious fellow student a lesson. They positioned themselves, each with a bucket of water, by the window of Butcher's room overlooking the college entrance. A figure approached and they tipped the water over him. Alas, the victim was no student; he was Dr Reynolds, the principal emeritus. Butcher, determined to confess and dressed in his best, presented himself at Sandholme, the Reynolds house in Broxbourne. The maid let him in. The Reynoldses were at tea and pressed their visitor to join them. After an agonizing meal Reynolds asked Butcher if he wished to see him privately; and there, in Reynolds's study with its trademark marble bust of Dante,

[54] *Life and Letters*, 566.

[55] Lilian Whitehouse, *Owen Charles Whitehouse of Cheshunt College* (Cambridge, 1916), 55.

[56] For William John Fairchild Huxtable (1912–90) and Ernest Alexander Payne (1902–80), see *ODNB*.

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Butcher confessed. Reynolds did not seem at all surprised. He merely said: 'next time, make sure it's the right man'. He had, after all, extracted ample punishment during the forty-five minutes of tea.[57] Such stories turn into legends and foster miracles. Such Congregational saints as Reynolds fostered mission and enlarged their contemporaries' understanding of the Church.

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57 Note taken of the conversation by C. Binfield, 20 March 1975. Reynolds had been a platform speaker at the first Free Church Congress, in November 1892. The story tends to confirm Butcher's recollections during a visit to Cheshunt College, Cambridge, told to me, but not written down, in the early 1960s. For B. T. Butcher (b. 1877), missionary in Papua 1904–41, see J. Sibree, *London Missionary Society: A Register of Missionaries, Deputations, etc.* (London, 1923), 150; N. Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society 1845–1948* (London, 1954), 420, 433, 518.

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