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Anti-Catholicism in Wales, 1900–1960

by TRYSTAN OWAIN HUGHES

The decline of anti-Catholic sentiment in twentieth-century England stood in stark contrast to attitudes in Wales, where a distinct and persistent anti-Catholic polemic was common as recently as the 1960s. While research into British anti-Catholicism has ignored the situation in twentieth-century Wales, many of the reasons suggested for the fervent nineteenth-century English hostility seem not only to explain the absence of Welsh animosity in the same era, but also to illuminate the predicament in Wales a century later. What we have is a striking example of historical synchronicity: two eras where the majority Christian denomination, already facing an internal crisis, reacts to a Church that is seen to threaten its existence and status, as well as the national way of life it upholds.

The genesis and development of British anti-Catholicism over the last two centuries has been the theme of much recent scholarly research.[1] The consensus reached is that the phenomenon belongs to the nineteenth century, that it was engendered by animosities within the established Church of England in particular, and that it was rooted in certain individual events, such as the Maynooth controversy of the 1840s and 1850s and the 'Papal Aggression' of 1850/1. By the early twentieth century, anti-Catholicism is held to have become, on the whole, a marginal issue, confined largely to the streets of Liverpool, Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland.[2] However true this may be of other areas of the United Kingdom, a comprehensive study of previously unexamined primary material, both manuscript and printed, makes it clear that, as far

[1] See E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, London 1968; W. L. Arnstein, *Protestant vs. Catholic in mid-Victorian England*, Columbia 1982; John Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade 1829–1860*, Oxford 1991; D. G. Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian England*, Stanford 1992; Frank H. Wallis, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian Britain*, Lampeter 1993.

[2] See P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool 1868–1939*, Liverpool 1981; Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow, the uneasy peace: religious tension in modern Scotland, 1819–1914*, Manchester 1987, and *Edinburgh divided: John Cormack and no popery in the 1930s*, Edinburgh 1987; Steve Bruce, *No pope of Rome: anti-Catholicism in modern Scotland*, Edinburgh 1985, and *God save Ulster: the religion and politics of Paisleyism*, Oxford 1986.

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as Wales is concerned, this conclusion needs to be modified. No study has hitherto noted the distinct and persistent anti-Catholic polemic which was common in Wales as recently as the 1960s.[3] Yet even the papacy itself frequently gave recognition to the unique situation it faced in Wales. In giving to the principality its own metropolitan archdiocese in 1916, it noted that 'Wales, a nation of Celtic origin, differs so much from the rest of England in language, traditions, and ancient customs.'[4] During the fifty years that followed, anti-Catholic attitudes among the Welsh flourished. However, twentieth-century Welsh anti-Catholicism was the product, not primarily of Anglicanism, but of Nonconformity. In press and on platform, the chapels continually derided the Roman Catholic Church as idolatrous, persecutory and as posing a critical threat to Welsh society. This was, without doubt, in stark contrast to the waning of anti-Catholicism on the other side of the border.

While research into British anti-Catholicism may have ignored the situation in twentieth-century Wales, many of the reasons for nineteenth-century English anti-Catholicism bear an uncanny resemblance to those current in Wales a century later. What we have is a striking example of historical synchronicity: two eras, though out of phase, nevertheless seeming to illuminate one another. Not only does the evidence suggest why Wales did not participate in the fervent anti-Catholicism of the Victorian era, but it also provides some explanation for its unique twentieth-century hostility towards Catholicism. Underlying both English and Welsh hostility, albeit almost a century apart, was the basic fact that during the relevant period religion was still a potent force in each country. Despite a level of decline in attendance at Welsh Nonconformist chapels in the twentieth century, their ministers still held much sway and influence, especially amongst the indigenous Welsh-speaking population. While in twentieth-century England secularisation resulted in religion possessing greatly diminished social significance, Protestantism was still very much the driving force in Welsh society. Aside from the potency of religion, recent studies of the Victorian period posit four principal reasons to explain the phenomenon of nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism. Each can in turn help us to understand hostile attitudes in Wales almost a century later.

The first explanation given to account for the great Protestant anti-Catholic offensive in the 1840s and 1850s is the massive increase in

[3] Trystan Owain Hughes, *Winds of change: the Roman Catholic Church and society in Wales 1916–62*, Cardiff 1999, provides a detailed background to the position of the Catholic Church in Wales during this period. It considers reactions to the growth of the Church, before outlining and assessing the background to its gradual acceptance within Welsh society. This article further explores issues raised in the author's wide-ranging study, focusing particularly on anti-Catholicism.

[4] *Cambria Celtica*, quoted in Donald Attwater, *The Catholic Church in modern Wales: a record of the past century*, London 1935, 149.

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numbers of Catholics at this time. Irish immigrants streamed into the industrial cities of England to escape famine and unemployment at home.[5] In Wales only the south-east corner and, to a lesser extent, the north-east corner, were affected by this early wave of Irish immigration.[6] Nor could Wales boast a sizeable indigenous Catholic population. English Catholicism had survived, through recusancy, from the time of the Reformation. The only truly Welsh Catholicism, however, was in the shape of a few landed gentry families, to be found mostly on the English border. In the nineteenth century, then, the vast majority of Welsh people had no direct contact with, or even experience of, the Church of Rome. So rare were Catholics in Wales, and so small their threat, that the itinerant anti-Catholic preacher Alessandro Gavazzi travelled through England, Scotland and Ireland in the years following the restoration of the Roman hierarchy in 1850 but did not once set foot in even the most anglicised areas of Wales.[7] Likewise, the nineteenth-century Protestant anti-Catholic organisations had almost nothing to do with Wales. Around fifty Protestant Association branches were established at this time across the British Isles, from Inverness to Truro, yet Wales was untouched.[8] The situation of the Reformation Society was similar, with outposts across England and Scotland but Wales only boasting a sole missionary station at Swansea.[9]

During the twentieth century, however, the numbers of Welsh Catholics increased so dramatically that Cardinal Newman's term for the resurgence of Roman Catholicism in England in the nineteenth century, the 'second spring', was soon adopted for Wales.[10] Repeated waves of Irish Catholic immigrants seeking employment reached every corner of the country. There were further Catholic immigrants from England and from further afield – notably Spain, Italy and Poland.[11] At a local level the burgeoning of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century led to rural communities coming into contact with Catholicism for the first time since the Reformation. Initial responses were hostile and occasionally violent, reflecting centuries of prejudice. Stones were thrown at the Ursuline Sisters at Llanelli in South Wales at the beginning of the century,[12] while fifty years later a Pole sustained serious injuries after being attacked on his way to mass at Nantgwrtheyrn in North Wales.[13] Such examples of

[5] The number of Catholic believers in England swelled from 30,000 in 1800 to 750,000 in 1850, a twenty-fold increase.

[6] Paul O'Leary, *Immigration and integration: the Irish in Wales, 1798–1922*, Cardiff 2000.

[7] Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, 28.

[8] Wolffe, *Protestant crusade*, 151.

[9] Ibid. 153.

[10] *Western Mail*, 16 Feb. 1960, 4.

[11] Trystan Owain Hughes, ''A new Irish invasion''?: twentieth-century immigration and the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Wales', *The Green Dragon* viii (1999), 26–30.

[12] *Menevia Record* i/1 (1953), 23.

[13] Christopher Magner, *The Lamp Society and the Welsh Travelling Mission*, Bridgnorth 1997, 6.

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violence were, however, rare. Even the riots against the Irish in south-east Wales during the nineteenth century were socio-economic in origin, rather than anti-Catholic.[14] Non-violent local hostility, however, was frequent during the twentieth century. Sermons of fire and fury were heard from Nonconformist pulpits,[15] demonstrations were held outside Catholic services,[16] letters of hostility were sent directly to Catholics[17] and Wyclif preachers declaimed against 'the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse'.[18] John Heenan, future cardinal-archbishop of Westminster, himself witnessed the animosity of the Welsh villages. After the success of his missionary work in England in the early 1950s, his ventures into Wales were cut short dramatically only a few miles from the English border, with an icy reception from non-Catholics at Welshpool.[19]

Such local attitudes, however, should not be overemphasised. While initial hostility was fierce, this was essentially due to a fear of the unknown rather than blind hatred and malice. 'Like communism in small-town America,' wrote Robert Storch of anti-Catholicism in nineteenth-century English society, 'Romanism was the more fearful for being so abstract and remote.'[20] Once Catholics settled into specific areas of Wales, integration began quite quickly as mixed marriages increased and individual church members came to be respected and well-liked. Local anti-Catholic prejudice was, then, soon overcome. It was also, on the whole, low-key and undramatic. There were no Orange Orders in Welsh towns, neither were there the organised anti-Catholic societies which England had witnessed a century before. Local hostility towards Catholics soon faded in the face of more pertinent threats to Welsh society – two world wars, wide-scale inter-war economic depression and increasing secularisation. The greatest manifestations of hostility towards Catholics in Wales, then, were not local lay attitudes, but came from Nonconformist ministers and deacons. Such animosity was therefore most frequent in those fields where the chapels could exert the strongest influence, such as at local civic council meetings, in articles and letter-pages of newspapers and periodicals, and at denominational conferences and committees. In this

[14] D. Williams, *A history of modern Wales*, London 1950, 230; O'Leary, *Immigration and integration*, 95–100, 306–7. In north-east Wales, there is evidence of specifically anti-Catholic violence at this time, but this was limited to a few, isolated incidents over a short period of time, mainly in 1850, the year of 'Papal Aggression': O'Leary, *Immigration and integration*, 100, 114.

[15] Alan Randall, *The Passionists at Carmarthen 1889–1986: a commemorative booklet*, [Carmarthen] 1986, 18.

[16] *The Tablet*, 5 Jan. 1935, 24.

[17] *Menevia Record* i/4 (1954), 3.

[18] Attwater, *Catholic Church*, 207; *The Tablet*, 29 July 1933, 130.

[19] *Menevia Record* viii/1 (1960), 12

[20] Robert Storch, 'Please to remember the fifth of November: conflict, solidarity, and public order in southern England, 1815–1900', in Robert Storch (ed.), *Popular culture and custom in nineteenth-century England*, London 1982, 82.

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more general sense, anti-Catholicism was just as fervid in twentieth-century Wales as it had been in nineteenth-century England.

The second reason suggested to explain nineteenth-century anti-Catholic aggression in England was the new-found confidence and triumphalism of the growing Church. There was a real belief that England could return to its ancient faith, and there was an awakening of self-confidence and assertiveness within the Church. It became aggressive and militant, not only ready to defend its own beliefs but also willing to go on the offensive, fervently evangelising and attacking detractors head-on.[21] In nineteenth-century Wales, however, Catholicism was still struggling to build foundations. The major issue was not to win converts but to stem leakage. Those isolated Catholics in rural areas needed to be tended, as did the immigrant Irish in the industrial towns of the south-east. Catholic self-confidence in Wales was not a nineteenth-century phenomenon and subsequently not a catalyst for hostility. This stood in contrast to the aggressive and evangelising spirit of the Mormons in nineteenth-century South Wales, and the violent Welsh opposition to them, which was far stronger than in any other part of Great Britain.[22] As the twentieth century dawned, however, Welsh Catholic assertiveness increased with the growth in numbers. Like the Latter Day Saints almost a century earlier, they also incited hostility through missionary zeal and purported arrogance. While neither Church gained many native converts, their direct and forthright evangelistic tactics nevertheless led to Welsh resentment and opposition. During the first sixty years of the twentieth century, groups of the more missionary-minded Catholic religious orders such as the Redemptorists and the Passionists settled in Wales, various evangelistic missions were held, literature was disseminated among non-Catholics and phrases such as 'one true Church' and 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' ('outside the Church no salvation') were often repeated. While Catholicism remained largely an immigrant faith, the potency of the Church at this time led confidence to be such as had never been witnessed before in a minority Welsh Church.

The 1850 restoration of the hierarchy had signalled a new phase in Catholic aggression in England and had engendered a sense of order and strength within the Church. A similar unity and vitality was evident within Wales as a result of the evolutionary diocesan changes between 1895 and 1916. If anything, the resulting confidence and enthusiasm within the Welsh Church far surpassed that which had been manifest at any time in England. At the turn of the century, the *Welsh Catholic Herald*

[21] See Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, 81ff.; Walter Ralls, 'The Papal Aggression of 1850: a study in Victorian anti-Catholicism', *Church History* xliii (1974), 245–6.

[22] Malcolm R. Thorp, 'Sectarian violence in early Victorian Britain: the Mormon experience 1837–1860', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* lxx (1988), 137.

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enthused that the belief in 'the re-conquest of Wales by Rome' was no longer a vain hope.[23] For the next fifty years the notion of the wholesale conversion of Wales to the ancient faith was frequently voiced. This was no minority belief, confined to hard-liners and extremists, but a conviction held and expressed by the Catholic intelligentsia, by the Catholic press[24] and by the hierarchy of both Wales[25] and England. In 1947 even Cardinal Griffin of Westminster spoke of an 'age of transition' in Wales, where 'the call of the past' was beginning to overpower the Welsh people.[26] Only a minority of perceptive Catholic commentators pointed out that the growth of the Church was the result of continuing immigration, rather than an upsurge in native converts. Even the relatively large number of converts revealed by Catholic statistics belied the nature of these conversions. The majority of converts did so through mixed marriages. These were, then, conversions largely for convenience, and such converts would often lapse thereafter.[27]

Although ultimately misplaced, however, optimism as to the future of the Church in the principality was accompanied by triumphant displays of Catholicism's newly discovered vigour. In some of the larger towns of South Wales in the inter-war years, the majestic processions of the Corpus Christi celebrations attracted as many as 30,000 Catholics annually. Likewise, following the Second World War, in Bala, in the heart of 'Welsh Wales', around 20,000 people each year would travel to a demonstration of the faith. Non-Catholics could not help but notice the increasing vitality of the Church of Rome as evidenced in these displays of numbers and strength.

Protestant response to this Catholic growth and aggression in Wales is closely related to the third reason put forward for anti-Catholic attitudes in nineteenth-century England, the internal crisis faced by the Established Church of England in the Victorian era. Social and political turmoil had crushed the optimism of the early nineteenth-century Anglican evangelicals and the Oxford Movement soon divided the Church into different camps. The outward aggression of the papacy angered and frightened Anglicans. Walter Ralls describes the 'sharp contrast between a seemingly monolithic Catholic faith, revitalised and expanded, and the disarray in which Protestantism found itself'.[28] The majority of Welshmen, however, were not members of the Church of England, but chapelgoers. Nonconformity was 'the religion of Wales'. Unlike the Anglican Church, the Welsh chapels faced little internal religious upheaval during the

[23] *Welsh Catholic Herald*, 22 Sept. 1899, 1.

[24] See *The Tablet*, 15 Aug. 1925, 206; 27 Dec. 1924, 864; 4 Apr. 1925, 439; *The Welsh Outlook* xiii (1926), 76ff.

[25] *Western Mail*, 10 Feb. 1936, 5.

[26] *Catholic Herald*, 10 Oct. 1947, 7.

[27] See Hughes, *Winds of change*, 38–43, 48–50.

[28] Ralls, 'Papal Aggression', 247.

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nineteenth century. Ostensibly strong, their power and influence remained largely unchallenged.

The twentieth century, however, saw the position of the Welsh chapels deteriorate. Secularisation began to take its toll. The pre-First World War optimism, epitomised by the 1904 revival, was soon called into question. Sunday school attendance fell sharply, chapels were closed and membership began to decrease. For the beleaguered Nonconformist denominations, the turmoil was made all the more poignant in view of the growth in numbers and confidence of the Catholic Church. There was a genuine fear resulting from the incessant talk of the conversion of Wales, from the outward shows of strength and from aggressive evangelism. Furthermore, Catholic confidence was such that Catholics were no longer willing to accept domination. 'Up to the present', announced a speaker in Cardiff in 1924, 'the Catholic Church has been on the defensive side ... [it is] high time we went on the aggressive side.'[29] Such 'aggression', however, served to further fuel the flames of inter-sectarian contention. Attacking Protestant doctrine as 'cold, individualistic and sterile'[30] and revelling in present Nonconformist misfortunes, merely incited anti-Catholicism.

Welsh anti-Catholic attitudes resulting from Catholic growth and Protestant decline found outlets in various ways and forms. Direct responses to the situation reflected deep fear and trepidation. Some Nonconformists reacted with prophecies of doom and damnation, while others poured scorn on Catholic optimism. No-popery demonstrations were witnessed at Catholic rallies,[31] correspondents in local newspapers pleaded for itinerant anti-Catholic preachers to visit their towns,[32] protests were made at 'the encroachment of Roman Catholicism on Protestant Communities' when Catholic churches were erected[33] and denominational publications and area meetings saw scathing attacks on the papacy.[34] The absurdity and extent of this fear and hatred was shown in the often-repeated Nonconformist claim that, with the apparent decline of the chapels, it would be better for children to be brought up as atheists than as Roman Catholics.[35] An almost frenzied anti-Catholic atmosphere was prevalent into the 1960s. 'Nothing but evil can come from the success of Popery in Wales, and everywhere else', the radical Nonconformist newspaper *Y Faner* had proclaimed in 1930.[36] Thirty years later, the response to a *Western Mail* article on the resurgence of

[29] *St Peter's parish magazine* iv (1924), 336.
[30] J. T. F. Williams, 'The conversion of Wales', *The Month* clxvii (Mar. 1936), 256–7.
[31] *The Tablet*, 16 Oct. 1948, 247.
[32] *Cambrian News*, in *The Tablet*, 29 July 1933, 130; cf. *Western Mail*, 22 Oct. 1936, 10.
[33] *Western Mail*, 3 Aug. 1955, 5.
[34] See *South Wales News*, 26 Mar. 1926, 9; *Y Dysgedydd* ix (1951), 218–21ff.
[35] *Y Cymro*, 10 June 1933, 15; *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 29 June 1949, 2.
[36] *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 24 June 1930, 4.

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Catholicism showed such virulent anti-Catholicism to be still very much alive. Literally hundreds of letters were received by the editor,[37] their contents so hostile that the editor closed the correspondence, condemning Wales's continuing 'vituperation, bigotry and intolerance'.[38]

There were also indirect responses to the burgeoning of the Catholic Church. These were especially apparent in the field of education, where there was a definite attempt to paint a veneer of respectability over animosity. Welsh Nonconformists regarded Catholic schools as centres of propaganda and indoctrination, and therefore threats to the chapel establishment. In 1949 H. W. J. Edwards wrote that the educational difficulties which Catholics were experiencing in Wales 'may amount to that degree of hostility known as persecution'.[39] Two controversies in particular summarise the deep animosity towards Catholic education that was prevalent throughout this period. Just as the use of taxpayers' money to assist in funding the Catholic seminary of Maynooth had ignited fervent anti-Catholicism in mid nineteenth-century England,[40] so the government's decisions to allow Catholic schools to be built in Colwyn Bay in the 1930s and Flint in the 1950s engendered similar reactions in Wales. While both Flintshire and Denbighshire county councils claimed that educational and economic reasons were behind their defiance of governmental policy, committee debates and the support they were given from Nonconformist associations revealed the true background to their intransigence.[41] At Flint, one councillor had even warned Catholics that he intended to make the Reformation itself pale into insignificance compared to this religious war.[42] 'We are a reformed Church', claimed the principal of Aberystwyth Theological College in his support for Flintshire's council's stand, 'and cannot sit back and allow our country to be taken over to the Roman Catholic faith without some protest.'[43]

It could certainly be suggested that all hostility towards Catholicism in twentieth-century Wales was rooted in the growth of the Roman Church and the gradual decline of the once strong chapels. Even the Welsh newspaper *Y Cymro* admitted in 1933 that the reason for hostility towards Catholicism 'is the fact that it is gaining ground in Wales while Calvinism is fast disappearing'.[44] In this way Welsh anti-Catholicism, like the nineteenth-century English attitudes before it,[45] can be interpreted as a manifestation of denominational rivalry, rather than mere negative bigotry. Ironically, though, animosity itself became a factor which helped Catholicism. It not only invigorated the sense of belonging and

[37] *Western Mail*, 8 Mar. 1960, 4.
[38] Ibid. 15 Mar. 1960, 4.
[39] *The Tablet*, 22 Jan. 1949, 55.
[40] See Norman, *Anti-Catholicism*, 23–51.
[41] *The Tablet*, 4 Apr. 1931, 468.
[42] *Menevia diocesan yearbook 1952*, 106.
[43] *Western Mail*, 18 June 1954, 7.
[44] *Y Cymro*, 15 July 1933, 5; cf. *Western Mail*, 6 Sept. 1948, 1.
[45] See *Recusant History* vi (1971), 210–21.

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community in the existing Church but also helped its growth: many converts cited hostility as a reason for their initial curiosity about the Church or as a factor which confirmed their apostasy.[46]

Reactions to the growth and confidence of Catholicism were exacerbated by the fact that the Church was viewed as far more than a mere denominational threat. The fourth and final reason suggested for the anti-Catholic spirit of nineteenth-century England was the popular belief that the Church of Rome posed a threat to the English way of life. Catholicism, it was maintained, was incompatible with the country's social, political, and religious institutions. The immigrant nature of the Church served to heighten the relevance of this accusation.[47] To Welsh Nonconformity in the nineteenth century, however, the threat to its way of life came instead from the menace of the Established Church with its clearly English values. The 'anti-traditionalist and anti-Catholic'[48] nature of Welsh dissent therefore resulted in an obsession with the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. Condemnations of the papacy were present,[49] and Nonconformists undoubtedly put their names to the anti-Catholic petitions of 1850,[50] but the Anglican establishment was the real *bête noire* of the period. Itinerant anti-Catholic preachers rarely visited Wales, yet the principality frequently welcomed prominent English anti-Church and State campaigners such as Edward Miall.[51]

In the twentieth century the Anglican threat gradually diminished, and by the 1920s the battle to disestablish and disendow the Church of England in Wales had been won. Anglican interest in denominational education soon faded and the icy Nonconformist and Anglican rivalries were melting with the dawn of the ecumenical movement. Whereas the stormy relationship between the Established Church and Dissent had been the greatest obstacle to a potent anti-Catholicism in nineteenth-century England,[52] ecumenism led to an effective united front against Roman Catholicism in Wales. In 1925 the Anglican Revd A. W. Wade-Evans denounced the anti-Catholic sentiments heard at an ecumenical service in St David's Cathedral. 'They had indeed met as one, but only to say that they were two', he wrote. 'Two in their views about God, but One in their opposition to Rome. They were united only on a negation. Their gathering was but an anti-Roman gesture.'[53]

Nineteenth-century Welsh hostility towards the Anglican Church had, then, been more than a religious feud. At its heart was the fact that the

[46] *Menevia Record* ii/4 (1955), 2; v/1 (1957), 16–17.

[47] See Sheridan Gilley, 'English attitudes to the Irish in England 1780–1900', in Colin Holmes (ed.), *Immigrants and minorities in British society*, London 1978, 93.

[48] R. O. F. Wynne, 'Post-Reformation Wales', *The Furrow* vii (1956), 202.

[49] See *Y Traethodydd* iii (1864), 110.

[50] See *Cambrian*, 20 Dec. 1850.

[51] Clyde Binfield, *So down to prayers: studies in English Nonconformity 1780–1920*, London 1977, 118–19.

[52] Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, 127–8.

[53] *The Welsh Outlook* xiii (1926), 9–10.

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Church of England was the English state Church and stood as an anglicising agent in the principality. In the years running up to disestablishment, however, the Anglican Church began to present itself as the 'National Church' of Wales. While Nonconformists naturally derided such a suggestion, the charge of anglicisation lost much of its former pertinence. It was now the Roman Catholic community which was denounced for its indifference to the Welsh way of life. This accusation acquired added significance as Welsh language and culture came under further attack. The Church possessed, after all, a largely immigrant nature. In the south-east, the Irish communities lived in self-made ghettos until the Second World War, and made little effort to assimilate into the host society.[54] The use of Gaelic,[55] St Patrick's Day Celebrations[56] and the flaunting of the Irish republican banner[57] served only to incite and anger Welsh Nonconformists. Even after the war immigrants across Wales either retained their old culture or embraced an anglicised consciousness. A social survey of the Catholic parish of Aberystwyth in 1955 revealed that only 2 per cent of its inhabitants regarded Welsh as their principal language, while 68 per cent regarded English as their mother tongue, 20 per cent Italian and 9 per cent Polish.[58] In similar words to anti-immigrant campaigners in England almost half a century later, the Catholic T. P. Ellis in 1936 described his fellow-religionists in Wales by noting that 'the major portion is of Irish or English extraction, with little interest in Wales as Wales. They dwell and earn their livelihood in Wales; and that is about all'.[59]

The Nonconformist response to this situation was somewhat apocalyptic. A motion passed by the Welsh Presbyterian Church at Nefyn in 1950 claimed that Catholicism was a threat, not only to the religion of Wales, but to its nationhood. 'If the Welsh nation falls, the collapse of Nonconformity in Wales will soon occur', the Revd Evan Lynch announced, 'if this happens then it will become a chance for the Papacy to extend its influence. The way to keep her at bay is through safeguarding the Welsh society.'[60] Not only were Nonconformity and Welsh culture

[54] The distinctive ethnic identity of Irish communities was, admittedly, rapidly fading. Yet up to the 1960s, and even among third and fourth generation immigrants, there was a continuing disposition towards Ireland and things Irish, and traditional practices (such as the St Patrick's Day celebrations) were clung to stubbornly: O'Leary, *Immigration and integration*, 312–13; Hughes, *Winds of change*, 179–81.

[55] *St Peter's parish magazine* ii (1922), p. xv.

[56] *The Tablet*, 24 Feb. 1951, 147.

[57] *Welsh Catholic Herald*, 15 May, 1920, 12.

[58] Michael P. Fogarty, 'A social survey of the parish of Aberystwyth' (1955), 2, typescript in Menevia diocesan archives, Aberystwyth file.

[59] *Catholic Times*, quoted in *Western Mail*, 18 May 1936, 7; cf. the remarkably similar description of the beliefs of Enoch Powell in Colin Holmes and Kenneth Lunn, 'Introduction', in Kenneth Lunn (ed.), *Hosts, immigrants, and minorities: historical responses to newcomers in British society 1870–1914*, Folkestone 1980, 6.

[60] *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 29 Mar. 1950, 1.

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regarded as inextricably linked, but so were Catholicism and anglicisation. The Independents' newspaper *Y Tyst* even accused the English government and Roman Catholics of insidious co-operation.[61] Only occasionally, however, was race blindly used in popular anti-Catholic polemic. The itinerant Wyclif preachers, for example, incited both religious and cultural prejudice against Catholics, with one reported to have suggested that the most popular song among the native Welsh population should be 'Go back to Erin'.[62] Rather than reflecting such racism, the general anti-Catholic animosity at this time came from Welsh-speaking Nonconformist ministers and deacons and was born out of a real fear that the Welsh way of life was dying. A similar attitude was also to be discerned in Scotland in the inter-war years, when the general assembly of the Church of Scotland expressed its fear that Irish Catholics could bring about 'the loss of the Scottish race to civilisation'.[63]

In Wales, the situation was made all the worse by the perception of Roman Catholicism itself as foreign to, and incompatible with, the national temperament. This, combined with the foreign character of the Catholic community, gave an opportunity for Welshmen to validate their anti-Catholicism. 'There is no disguising the fact', announced the Wesleyan Revd Lewis Edwards in 1931, 'that Roman Catholics are opposed to everything the Welsh people hold dear in their national life.'[64] Catholic beliefs were held to be the complete antithesis of Nonconformist doctrines and Welsh values, which since the eighteenth century had been regarded as inextricably bound together. It was noted, for example, that Catholicism derided Welsh sabbatarianism and the nationally symbolic achievement of the Welsh Sunday Opening Act of 1881.[65] Rome was also seen as detrimental to the Nonconformist ideal of freedom, with its whole system accused of having fascist overtones and of leading to oppression and bondage. The alleged superstition of Catholic dogma was likewise held to be anathema to a Welsh Nonconformity which had emerged very much enlightened from the liberal Christianity and modernism of the preceding century. In discussing the origins of nineteenth-century English anti-Catholicism, John Wolffe suggested that enlightened thought reinforced hostility towards Roman Catholicism which was viewed as maintaining the intolerance of a former age.[66] Certainly, twentieth-century Welsh society was scathing of the Catholic Church's continued

[61] *Y Tyst*, 14 Dec. 1950, 6.

[62] *Western Mail*, 22 Oct. 1936, 10; cf. *Welsh Catholic Times*, 25 Mar. 1932, 1.

[63] Quoted in Callum G. Brown, *Religion and society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh 1997, 193. See also Stewart J. Brown, '"Outside the covenant": the Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish immigration 1922–1938', *Innes Review* xlii (1991), 19–45.

[64] *The Tablet*, 23 May 1931, 672.

[65] The *Welsh Catholic Herald* (15 Jan. 1932, 1) referred to 'the absurd restrictions' of the act, while Catholic priests even campaigned for Sunday opening (ibid. 19 Feb. 1932, 4).

[66] Wolffe, *Protestant crusade*, 11.

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'arrogant' claim to be the 'one true Church' and its rejection of ecumenical participation.[67] The irony of the whole situation was revealed in the extent and bitterness of such attacks on Catholic 'intolerance'.

The threat that Roman Catholicism posed to Welsh values was magnified by the belief that the Vatican was again becoming a political power. In 1930 the Cardiff and district evangelical church council announced that any favourable treatment of Catholic educational claims was 'tantamount to the treasonable support of an alien and hostile *imperium in imperio*'.[68] As in nineteenth-century America,[69] a real fear of internal political subversion was engendered. At times 'papaphobia', the fear of a secret papal political conspiracy and offensive,[70] was so impassioned that 'an atmosphere of hysteria' was created in Welsh Nonconformist circles of this period.[71] One prominent Nonconformist, for example, caused a storm at the beginning of the Second World War by warning of the increasing influence of Catholics at the Foreign Office. W. J. Gruffydd claimed that the loyalty of these Catholics to a politically scheming and fascist pope placed Wales and the rest of Britain in grave danger. 'A strong section of the Catholic Church has been working out of sight, in every direction in life', he wrote, 'not only to restore the Church's control over individual men's morals but to restore its power and sovereignty over the State.'[72]

Ironically, the situation was made even worse by the fact that there were a number of converts to Catholicism among the leaders of the newly formed Welsh Nationalist Party, including its early president, Saunders Lewis.[73] With Lewis and his fellow intellectual, elitist band of native converts, a new movement emerged within Welsh Catholicism, a movement which saw a return to Catholicism, the pre-Reformation faith of Wales, as the key to cultural and national rebirth. The importance of individual Catholics, and subsequently of Catholic political and social teaching, to the development of twentieth-century Welsh nationalism, however, belies the reality of the situation. The vast majority of Catholics in Wales were indifferent to, if not contemptuous of, Welsh affairs.

[67] *Western Mail*, 17 Aug. 1937, 9. [68] Ibid. 19 June. 1930, 6.

[69] See David Brion Davies, 'Some themes of counter-subversion: an analysis of anti-Masonic, anti-Catholic, and anti-Mormon literature', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* xlvii (1960), 205–24.

[70] Cf. Robert J. Klaus, *The pope, the Protestants, and the Irish: papal aggression and anti-Catholicism in mid nineteenth-century England*, London 1987, 287.

[71] Emlyn Sherrington, 'Welsh nationalism, the French revolution and the influence of the French right 1880–1930', in David Smith (ed.), *A people and a proletariat: essays in the history of Wales 1780–1980*, London 1980, 127. [72] *Y Llenor* xix (1940), 121–6.

[73] Others included R. C. Richards (editor of the *Welsh Nationalist*), Catherine Daniel (wife of J. E. Daniel, who succeeded Saunders Lewis as president of the party), T. Charles Edwards (history master at Ampleforth Abbey), Victor Hampson Jones and R. O. F. Wynne (squire of Garthewin in north Wales).

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Furthermore, in terms of political direction, they were working-class supporters of the Labour party and staunchly opposed to the Nationalist party's right-wing policies and its largely intellectual and pseudo-aristocratic leadership. Still, to Welsh Nonconformists, the prominent (if minority) presence of Catholics within the Welsh Nationalist Party seemed to confirm their suspicion of the political aspirations of the Catholic Church. Ironically, then, *Plaid Cymru*, as the party became known, was dogged in its early years with the taint of being an agent of the Catholic Church and an advocate of Fascism.[74] 'In the independent, totalitarian, fascist, and papist Wales', the Revd Gwilym Davies warned the chapels in a bitter attack on the party in 1942, 'there will be only one party, one church and one language.'[75]

Welsh anti-Catholicism quickly waned in the 1960s. The integration of the immigrant communities, an increasing general religious indifference and the entry of the Catholic Church into the ecumenical sphere, all contributed to this change in attitude. By the end of the twentieth century, anti-Catholic aggression was to be found only in the occasional hostile article in evangelical magazines[76] and in the minority presence of the Ku Klux Klan in the South Wales valleys.[77] Between 1900 and 1960, however, anti-Catholicism had been very much alive in Welsh society. The reasons for this almost paralleled those which had engendered prejudice in nineteenth-century England: the Catholic Church was growing in both numbers and strength, and seemed to be threatening the majority denomination and the values of the society it represented. Yet Welsh opposition had developed along its own unique lines. It was a national rather than a local phenomenon, and it was largely the preserve of Welsh-speaking Nonconformist ministers and prominent lay people. Protestant opposition was often rational in its premises, in the sphere of education for example,[78] yet it was also clearly disproportionate, its fervency revealing a deep-seated hostility towards a new threat to the Welsh establishment. D. G. Paz's claim that, aside from Ulster, Liverpool and Glasgow, anti-Catholicism was 'very much marginal in the twentieth-century British isles'[79] certainly needs to be modified in the light of

[74] See Hughes, *Winds of change*, 71–80.

[75] *Y Traethodydd*, July 1942, 107. See also D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r seiliau sicr: Detholiad o ysgrifau J. E. Daniel*, Llandysul 1993, 63–4.

[76] Alan Spencer, 'Pabyddiaeth heddiw', *Y Cylchgrawn Efengylaidd* xxx (1993), 25–6.

[77] *Times*, 21 June 1999, 37, 40.

[78] Even Saunders Lewis admitted this fact: 'A note on Welsh education', *Blackfriars* xxix (1948), 139–41.

[79] Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, 302. Whilst warning that the issue was far more complex and nuanced than others have previously suggested, John Wolffe nevertheless still describes a general decline in the strength of twentieth-century British anti-Catholicism without making reference to the situation in Wales: 'Change and continuity in British anti-

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new research into the situation in Wales. The extent of Welsh hostility is illustrated by the response of one Nonconformist county councillor to his council's rejection of a Catholic application for a school at Pembroke Dock in the late 1940s. 'Sir', he announced to the meeting's chairman, 'the Christians win.'[80]

Catholicism, 1829–1982', in Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (eds), *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789*, London 1996, 67–83.

[80] *Menevia diocesan yearbook 1952*, 107. See also *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 5 Jan. 1949, 2.

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