

The content of the courses would be wider and would include a sound knowledge of at least one non-Christian religion (this was a commonplace in the heyday of classical education and is far from a revolutionary novelty). The student would be introduced to some of the wide variety of views on religion and helped to grasp something of the methods and disciplines involved. Participant education in religion would be available to those students who wished to understand their inherited religion in greater depth. These measures would ensure a proper respect for the fluidity of the religious identity of children: religion can only live if it is genuine, and genuine religion (however primitive it may seem to the observer) is worthy of respect in itself (as is any other genuine attitude to religion). This respect would do more to ensure the possibility of honesty and integrity *vis-à-vis* religion in mature life than the compromises and implicit dishonesties of the present system.

'Teaching the Catholic religion' has always been accepted by Catholics as a limited activity. The grace of God is a gift not of the teacher but of God. My view of religious education is wider than that of the catechist—is it also more catholic?

Some Eighteenth-century Remarks on Clerical Celibacy

by J. Derek Holmes

Of course, a serious question deserves a serious answer, but is importance necessarily associated with solemnity, especially if the problem is unlikely to be solved in the immediate future? Might it not be possible or even desirable in such a situation to relax, if only for the moment, and treat the problem neither indifferently nor lugubriously, but with a certain degree of *panache* or even irresponsibility—for our own sakes, if nobody else's? Such thoughts were prompted by reading through one particular controversy among English-speaking Catholics during the eighteenth century. At the time, many Catholics were dissatisfied with the attitudes and laws of the Church, not least on the issue of celibacy. Furthermore, these critics, no doubt largely influenced by the temper of the time, regarded themselves as liberal and enlightened in their own religious approach. How then were they to regard the clerical 'vert'?¹

¹Incidentally, this controversy also helps to illustrate the fate of publications issued on one side of the Atlantic at the hands of publishers on the other!

In 1784, Charles Henry Wharton, one of the first American Jesuits, published *A Letter to the Roman Catholics of the City of Worcester* where he had previously served as chaplain, giving his reasons for joining the Anglican Church. This pamphlet, first published in Philadelphia and reprinted in London about three months later, was particularly successful because it was, to use the publisher's phrase, written in 'a spirit of moderation and liberality'. Wharton was answered by, among others, John Carroll, the first American Bishop, and William Pilling in *A Caveat addressed to the Catholics of Worcester* (London, 1785). Pilling in turn was answered by a former Benedictine, John Hawkins, in *An Appeal to Scripture, Reason, & Tradition* which supported Wharton's *Letter*, while Joseph Berington replied in his *Reflections addressed to The Rev. John Hawkins* (Birmingham, 1785).

But the London edition of Carroll's *Address to the Roman Catholics of the United States of America* included a Postscript which implied that Wharton's motives were 'not so pure as he would anxiously have them believe'.

It is no secret in and about WORCESTER, that *his intimacy with a certain young female*, in a family not many miles from his late house, was of such a complexion, as to give public cause of suspicion, that it could not originate in DIVINE LOVE; nor could the express and positive prohibitions of his superiors restrain him, from frequently and repeatedly visiting her.—The Catholics of Worcester are therefore inclined to believe, that their late Chaplain's *attachment* to the young lady above mentioned, whom he knew he could not possess without renouncing his religion, was the primary source whence all *his religious doubts and scruples* proceeded.

The publisher concluded by stating that should Carroll ever have the opportunity of reading the Postscript, he would be able to guess at the motives governing Wharton's conduct and understand the latter's concern for the 'purity of his intentions';

*Nature has made man's breast no windores,
To publish what he does within doors;
Nor what dark secrets there inhabit,
Unless his own rash folly blab it.*

Other Catholics, however, rejected such an approach as offensive. The London edition of Carroll's *Address* was condemned as 'Spurious and Subreptitious . . . smuggled into the World, in a clandestine manner' by another publisher who 'in justice to the Author and the Roman Catholics of Worcester . . . thinks himself obliged to lay before the Public a true and genuine edition of the said work, as taken literally from that printed at *Annapolis in Maryland*'. This publisher rejected the assertions made in the Postscript which he described 'as unwarrantable in themselves, and injurious to the Roman Catholics of Worcester'. He thinks that Mr *Carrol* will appear more acceptable

to the Public in his own natural garb, than in one rent and mangled, or otherwise deformed.' In view of the fact that this edition was published by J. Tymbs who also published Hawkin's *Appeal*, it would seem that English Catholics and former Jesuits were even more 'liberal' than one might expect!

In a second edition, the London publisher seized on the fact that the Worcester version was published by a clergyman who was formerly a member of the Society of Jesus:

his Reverence seems to be very angry that any intimation should be given of his late Brother Jesuit Wh-rt-n's having any other *love* which induced him to renounce his Religion, but what was *pure* and *divine* . . . The Public of every religious denomination, are too well settled in their opinion of the *real motives* which induce Catholic Churchmen to conform to the established Religion, to be shaken by the assertions of the Rev. Father.

The same publisher, Patrick Keating, also issued *A Review of the Important Controversy between Dr. Carroll and the Reverend Messrs. Wharton and Hawkins* (London, 1786) by the Reverend Arthur O'Leary.

O'Leary was an Irish priest living in London who was on friendly terms, though he did not completely sympathize with the members of the cisalpine Catholic Committee. When his *Review* appeared, the publisher informed the public;

Since the most distinguished Characters of the present Day have borne such ample Testimony to the Candour, as well as to the Eminent Abilities of our Author, the very Name of O'LEARY carries with itself *such weight* and is become so respectable amongst the liberal minded of every description, as to render Panegyric both vague and superfluous.

O'Leary immediately addressed himself to the issues raised by Wharton and Hawkins; the first

complains of two heavy and unwarrantable constraints, under which he laboured, whilst he professed himself a catholic clergyman; the one, a prohibition to chuse his religion from scripture, *according to his fancy*; the other, which seems to him still more grievous, is, the being debared the privilege of taking to himself *a female helpmate*, by whose assistance he might be enabled to explain them in a more *sensible* manner.

O'Leary then turned to Hawkins

who, from similar motives with the gentleman just mentioned, has also read his recantation: hitherto this gentleman has not favoured the world with any treatise calculated to reform the vitiated morals of a corrupt age; but for this omission he has made ample amends, by contributing to the propagation of the human species, as well by his example, as by his celebrated *treatise against celibacy*. If virginity be a monster, *monstrum horrendum ingens*, he is to be ranked in the front of those heroes who are ready to encounter and destroy it. (pp. 3-4.)

Reflecting his own opinions and the temper of the time, O'Leary went on,

I should have left them for ever in the undisturbed enjoyment of their PRIESTESSES, and the propagation of their *mixed religious race*, had they not revived those controversies, which the liberality of an enlightened and philosophic age has doomed to doze on the shelves of college libraries: or had they not made the ungenerous attempt to draw on the English catholics the hatred of their protestant neighbours, by the revival of the hackneyed charge of their denouncing damnation against heretics, and the prohibition of scriptural information.

In spite of the support which they had previously received from their former co-religionists, Wharton and Hawkins were now prepared to endanger the houses and property of Catholics, while subjecting them to the forces of popular prejudice and the risk of hostile attacks.

O'Leary insisted that 'the real motives of these pretended conversions' had been revealed in the Postscript of the London edition of Carroll's *Address*. In any case,

the complaints of the converts themselves *against chastity*, and their subsequent conduct, would have enabled me to form my conjectures. One of them [Wharton] sets forth with the modesty of a vestal; the *Postscript* removes the veil with a *gentle hand*, and exposes a ——. (p. 5.)

O'Leary reminded his readers of the effect of unbridled passions on the voice of conscience and human judgment, and the need to suspect 'the candour of apologies, which originate in sensuality and the love of carnal pleasures'. He went on,

When these gentlemen exchanged their breviaries for *Calvides Laetus's Callipedia*,* and their sacerdotal vestments for the *cestus of Venus*, the catholics of England did not ring the alarm bell: they considered the separation of such persons as no loss to their religion; nor as *any precious acquisition* to that which they *feigned* to embrace: they knew, that a catholic clergyman, who tramples on his vows, renounces his breviary, and deserts the sacred altar, would as soon become a turkish *Iman* at Constantiple as a *parson* in England, were it not through the dread of the operation of the circumcision knife. (pp. 6-8.)

After defending Catholics from the charges made by Wharton and Hawkins, and illustrating the fact that other Christians, particularly English Protestants, were not free from similar accusations, O'Leary returned to the issue of celibacy and denied that the Church ever forced celibacy on her ministers.

*The Art of begetting pretty Children, an heroic poem, written in elegant Latin verse, in which all the rules of that art are laid down; RULES by far more agreeable to flesh and blood, than the rules of ST. BENEDICT OR IGNATIUS. How far the study of them may tend to influence the features of Messrs. H-k-n's and Wh-rt-n's children, I will not take upon me to say; of this however I am certain, that all over Europe, the children of those who have taken orders in the Roman church (next to hang-men and priest-catchers) make the most forbidding appearance.'

The alternative is at their own *free choice*, either to become her ministers, and lead a life of *celibacy*, or to sanctify themselves in the world in a state of *marriage*. (p. 56.)

Furthermore, many lay people who did not enjoy the protections associated with the clerical state were also called to lives of chastity.

Turning to the differences between the editions of Carroll's *Address* published in Annapolis and London, O'Leary proceeded to justify his publisher. The differences were the Postscript itself, 'the editor's manner of arranging and condensing the doctor's arguments, whereby they become more clear and perspicuous to the reader' (p. 62), and the omission of a note in which Carroll criticized as 'artful and temporizing' the pope responsible for the suppression of the Jesuits. This note was inserted in the second edition of Carroll's *Address* 'to indulge the curiosity of the public'; the publication of the Postscript and the changes made were justified on the grounds that this was a usual practice among publishers.

The publisher had not altered the sense of what Carroll had said, but simply avoided the errors and inaccuracies of the Annapolis edition.

I find *the cloath to be the same*, he has only given it a *smarter trim*, and the tighter THE JACKET OF CONTROVERSY, the better. (p. 65.)

Indeed, the fact that these changes had strengthened Carroll's arguments and made a deeper impression on his readers was evident from the way in which Hawkins protested so strongly about them. The actual statements contained in the Postscript were justified by 'the experience of ages' and confirmed by Wharton's own condemnation of chastity 'as a cruel usurpation of the unalienable RIGHTS OF NATURE; as *unwarrantable* in its principle, *inadequate* in its object, and *dreadful* in its consequences'.

It is not necessary to agree with O'Leary's opinions or sympathize with his sentiments to appreciate his robust, if sometimes cruel, controversial approach—no doubt the laws of libel were less stringent in those days. But one might also envy the supreme confidence of the other Catholic apologists who could defend their own position and that of their co-religionists, while sympathizing with or even accepting various points made by their opponents. If controversy was more 'full-blooded', it was also more discriminating and consequently (dare we say it) more 'liberal' and 'enlightened'.